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ARGOSY

STORIES BY

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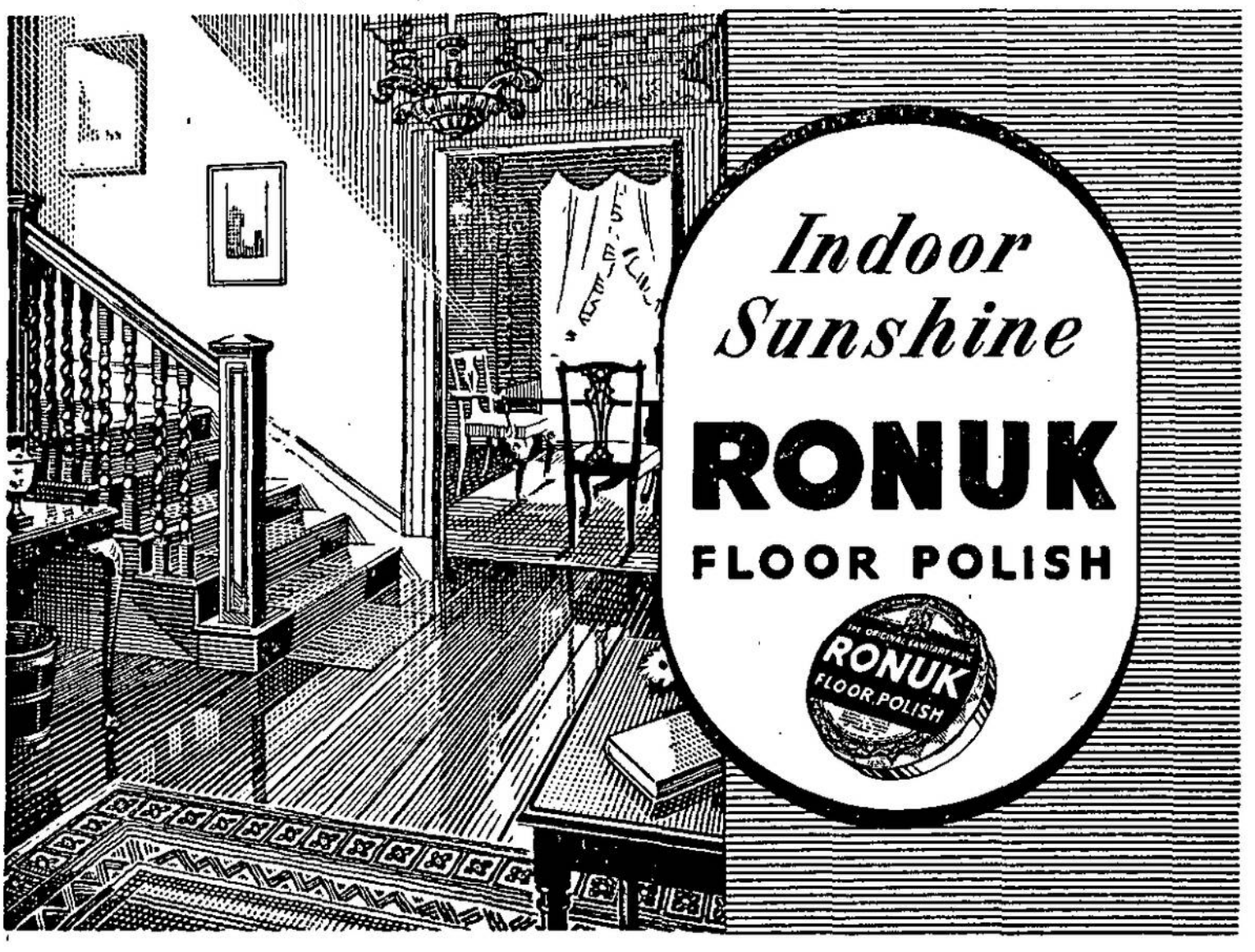

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ARGOSY

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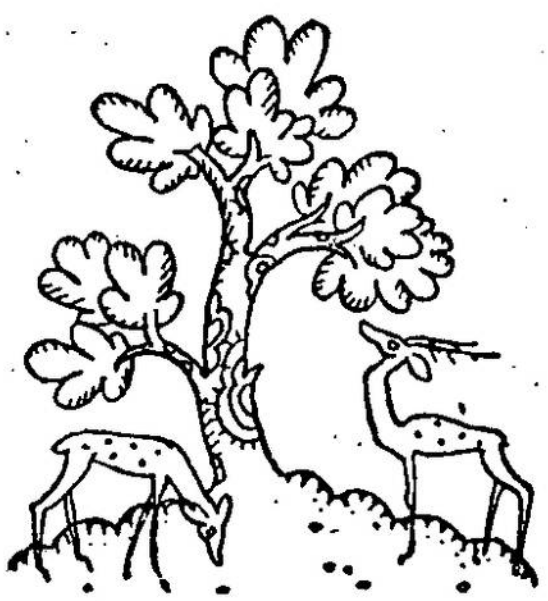
Pied Wagtail

O WHITE wonder, O dazzle of dark delight,
Bold platitude of colours' interplay
Where, in an active emblem, night and day
Marry and alternate with day and night :
Until you suddenly dartled into sight
This April morning, Lent lilies aglow
On tree-secluded lawn, I could not know
The one thing wanting was your black and white.

Across the green and golden stage you run,
To dip your clear symbolical device
Thrice in the shallow bird-bath, and are gone,
Swift as a dream, the vivid drama done.
Could but these rhymes recall you, others' eyes,
Souls yet unborn, would echo my surprise.

GERALD BULLETT



KING OF THE BEES

"Whatever are you laughing at, travelling-man?" asked the girl

by BRYAN MacMAHON

IT was morning when Xandy, the young red-haired travelling-man, came over the crest of the hill-road and looked down into the furze-brilliant lap of land that lay between him and the sea. Set pleasantly, if haphazardly, amid the lacy walls of small fields, thatched cottages gleamed lime-white in the April sunshine. The road on which he stood ran on a mile-and-a-half-long ridge and was lost for a moment of vision where the grey shops of the village stood stone-cold in the warming countryside. On the hedges beside and beneath the traveller fuchsia leaves were as yet dark-black—the upland heather, too, was as yet unlighted by the splendid year.

Ignoring a boreen that fell away towards the sea-cliffs Xandy thrust swiftly onwards. After a while he reached a ruined cabin on the seaward side of the road. The soft rain of the night before and the newly-minted morning sunshine following on its track had evoked the vinegary smell of soot and mortar and rotten thatch and nettle-bed from the space between the walls of the broken cabin.

Glancing up, Xandy then spied the bee-swarm hung from a scrap of rafter that projected over the place where once the wicker of the inner chimney breast-wall had been. Hanging there the swarm resembled a swallow's nest. Xandy's freckled face tightened with puckishness and his lips parted with pleasure. Bee country this would be, he thought, after a glance at the fields below him, for, look—here lay fuchsia and clover and heather! Here, from time immemorial, the bees would have worn traditional lanes in the air.

For a while Xandy continued to watch the swarm; its nadir was alive with outriders scrawling angrily in the air. Then, as a movement in the spread of land below him caught his attention, he glanced downwards and descried a little man standing on a fence with his hands screening his eyes against the sunlight. Beside the watcher was the glint of a bicycle and the naked blaze of a timber box.

Again, glancing to the right, where, half a mile away, a similar boreen writhed through the fields to the sea, Xandy saw another watcher—a heavy man, and a postman, too, if one were to judge by the sunlight striking his peaked cap. He was mounted on a heavy

piebald cob—across the pommel was swung what Xandy's keen eyes told him was a limp mail-sack. This man's eyes, too, were hand-screened against the sunlight. Glancing again from one to the other of the two men, Xandy laughed outright. He lifted his hat with a gay flick of his thumb and leaped on to the dike beside the cabin where he cupped his hands about his laughing mouth.

" Bee-e-e-e-s ! " he halloo-ed merrily into the open cup of the countryside. " Bee-e-e-e-s ! "

On hearing the cry, both the figures in the lowlands grew strangely agitated. The small man hobbled down from the fence, cast himself at his bicycle and began to pedal furiously uphill towards the main road. The postman, too, was urging his heavy steed forward as speedily as the weight of mount and mounted would allow. A laughing girl wearing a fawn shawl and carrying a market-basket across her arm—she was twenty at most—had stolen up on Xandy.

" Whatever are you laughing at, travelling-man ? " she asked. The girl's pleasant face was enhanced by morning sunlight.

Xandy looked down from his perch.

" Money from the sky ! " he said slowly, his mind not wholly on the giving of information. Vaguely he indicated the swarming bees.

" Ah ! " the girl breathed, her lips shining apart. " Bees ! Hung, too, they are from the rafter of my grandfather's cabin." Instinct then ensured that she should shake her left arm free from the coloured tassels of her shawl and show that the fingers of her left hand were innocent of rings or ornament.

The cyclist had gained the main road in the east ; the horseman the road in the west. They were coming towards the cabin, both riding onwards at a furious rate.

" This one is Tailor Mullally," the girl laughed, indicating the cyclist. " And this—the almighty jockey on the horse—is Peter the Post. Bee-men both—they'd drive a knife to the hilt in your back to possess or to recover a swarm o' bees ! "

From the immediate west came the sulky clop of a horse's hooves ; from the near east the clacking and missing of a rusty and erratic gear-wheel. The fat postman was first on the scene, his back was preternaturally straight and his belly before him hung a-quivering like blancmange with the dint of desperate riding. Anger had receded deep into his flabby face. With a loud cry of " Whoa ! " he flung himself heavily from the cob's back, then tightening the strap of the old post-bag about his wrist, he waddled quickly towards the bush-blocked gap that led to the cabin.

Straight away the angry tailor came up, tossed himself from his bicycle and, grasping his timber box, moved hoppity-hop so as to insert himself in the gap by the side of the fat postman. For a

moment the men were locked in the thorns of the narrow opening.

" *My* bees, postman ! " the tailor spat, angrily.

" Liar ! " Deep and full the voice in reply.

" Witness what he called me, stranger ! " the tailor sang out in a high falsetto, the while he fairly danced with rage.

Xandy shifted comprehendingly from one leg to another.

Still eyeing Xandy fiercely, the tailor pointed up at his bees. " Witness, also," he cried out, " that my bees are branded ! "

Tolerantly, but forcefully, the postman pushed his rival aside and tugged his clothes from the thorn hooks. " Bees branded ! " He laughed richly, like a bass singer. " Red raddle on their rumps, maybe, like boughten cattle at a fair."

The tailor's face contorted with triumph. " Not raddle, friend, but sprinkled flour as they were leaving my hive. See ! "

With a quickening interest, Xandy and the girl glanced up : true—the swarm as a whole seemed faintly dusted with a white powder. In the fastnesses of its fat the postman's face registered a minor defeat. Then he snorted deeply. " Whitewash from the old wall," he said. " The bees are mine ! "

" Mine ! "

" Mine, I say ! "

The conflict had drawn Xandy and the girl together. Speaking in an arch whisper, she reminded him : " On my grandfather's cottage the bees are. You'll not forget that, travellin'-man ? "

" Sssh ! " Xandy enjoined. " Yours they'll be ! "

High voice and low voice were now at it fast and harsh. The postman tore the bush from the gap and waddled into the ringed potato-sown field at the gable of the ruined cottage ; thence he tried to find a way to come at the blind side of the swarm. Breathing stertorously, he began to hoist himself on to the low dry-wall. As he did so the tailor, his anger snapping like a twig, spat out an imprecation and flung the wooden box at his rival. The flat of the box struck the postman on the side of his head, sent his official cap askew and revealed the undreamt-of extent of his baldness. The blow also caused him to stagger sideways for a step or two. Recovering himself, he desperately adjusted his cap, clenched his great fists, crouched till he appeared to be all muscle rather than blubber, and then lumbered into the potato-garden in pursuit of his assailant.

Hither and thither the pair dodged on the heavily-ridged ground. The shortness of one of the tailor's legs was proving rather to his advantage, for by keeping his shorter leg on the ridge and his longer leg in the furrow, he managed famously. Once, as the postman was almost upon him, the tailor turned in such a small compass as caused his pursuer to fall forward on to the ridge, where quick as wink as he

struggled to rise, he rolled over to the broad of his back in the deep furrow and was there trapped like a sheep prone in a hillside gully.

Straight away the tailor ceased his skipping, and with a cry of triumph, picked up a clod of earth and flung it at the recumbent and roaring postman. As Xandy uttered a cry of reprimand the tailor snatched up his box and leaped on to the low dry-wall. Thence he started to claw upwards on to the stout clay gable. Reaching a point of vantage he lay full length on the wall and pulling his tweed cap over his eyes, set about capturing the honey-drugged swarm.

Xandy dragged the heavy postman to his feet. He kept exhorting him not to kill his rival: "He's not worth butchering!" he urged in dubious peace-making: "It's common knowledge that it takes nine bulldogs and a tailor to make an entire man."

"I'll skin him alive!" said the fat fellow, still speaking out of a vast expressionless face.

The girl on the roadway was demureness itself. With prudent but irate movements, the postman crossed the treacherous furrows. At the gable-end his breathing grew noisy as he noted that the tailor's legs dangled well out of his reach. He then cast about him for some weapon: finding nothing more lethal than clods and potato-stalks he rushed to the back of the tumbled cottage and thrust in by the gapped doorway. Xandy came sprinting close on his heels.

The tailor was on the very point of boxing the swarm. The postman dragged up a handful of grass to which a lump of rabbit-sand and mortar was adhering. This missile he flung at the cluster of bees. The swarm disintegrated in rage and outrage. The tailor dropped his box and, still jockeying the wall, pressed his hands over his ears and thrust his face into the dried clay. Xandy, too, crouched with his face close to the rubble with his ears protected by his fingers. The bees milled outwards and upwards from the broken cabin.

On the ground beneath his face Xandy saw three or four fallen and puzzled bees that clambered dully but purposefully over the rubble, as if in pursuit of an insect grail. Three of the bees then converged upon the fourth. This central bee seemed to differ from its fellows: it was slender, long, torpedo-tailed and clear-lined. Its wings seemed inadequate for flight, and—a characteristic the others lacked—there was a positive yellowness on the underpart of its body. Xandy bit back his cry of triumph on realizing that here, under his hand, lay the key to the whole swarm in the person of the queen bee.

Swiftly thrusting his hand into the pocket of his tattered jacket, he emptied his matchbox; taking out the three-quarter-opened box he placed it upside down on top of the queen and then, shrewdly closing the box, trapped her. Glancing up, Xandy reconnoitred the sky. All he could see was the high violent moving of dots that somehow could be construed as whiplashes cracking in the bright

upper air. He rose to a crouch, then moved quickly out through the front doorway of the cabin and joined the girl on the roadway.

" Let us be going ! " he said, indicating the distant village.

" You're leaving that pair to slaughter one another ? " she asked.

" There isn't a solid blow between the pair of them," Xandy said, at the same time gingerly placing his hand into his pocket and denting the match-box so that the queen would have air.

Xandy and the smiling girl had begun walking along the roadway. Snippets of conversation fell between them like chips flying from a whittled stick. Glancing over his shoulder, Xandy noticed that the mounted postman made a grotesque figure as, with his canvas sack covering his head, he rode into the west. The tailor, box on head, then passed them out, muttering away to himself. The pair of rivals left the main road and took separate boreens that ran downwards to the sea. The swarm was still scattered in the sky. Now and again a single bee fashioned a figure-of-eight over Xandy and the girl as they moved onwards in the direction of the village.

As they reached the first public-house at the village edge, the girl readied her shopping basket. With a smile Xandy said : " If I treated you to a glass of wine—I'd have to go drouthy myself ! " The girl laughed her thanks, then Xandy added : " I'll own a sovereign within the hour—that I'll promise you ! "

They entered the pub together. To the alert but dour publican, Xandy sang out : " A pint of draught, decent man ! " He slapped a silver coin on the counter. The girl sauntered slowly to the grocery end of the shop where she entered into ready conversation with the publican's wife. Thereafter her eye kept wandering towards the wandering man. When the publican's wife had grown aware of her customer's scrutiny her eyes softened in gladness.

The woodwork of the bar was stained and varnished coffin-bright. Behind the bar pewter vessels hung from brass cup-hooks driven into the grand painted mock tuns ; upon these tuns were serried the cobwebbed glory of smuggled wines. The walls were dry-distempered an easy green. Through the back window the sunshine struck down in a short but fine shaft to the white-sanded floor. Waiting for his drink, Xandy seated himself on a stool at the wall and, taking out his matchbox, examined it intently. He seemed so engrossed that the long bald head and dark face of the publican emerging into brightness caught him unawares.

The publican's lips parted as he set the drink on the counter. " See a swarm o' bees west the road, young fellow ? " he inquired.

Xandy took his time about replying. " That I did, now that you mention it," he said at last.

" And a pair o' men on their track ?"

" One a fat fellow on horseback, the other a spancelled fellow on a rusty bike ? "

" You have 'em ! Which of 'em has the swarm ? "

" Neither the one nor the other ! " Xandy took a tantalizing sip out of his drink, then looked up truculently : " They're still chasin' what belongs to me."

" You ! " Long-face whinnied his stained-toothed laughter.

" Wild knows wild, rooted publican ! " Xandy spat his contempt to the glistening sand. The publican was momentarily taken aback. His wife and the girl ceased their conversation.

The sound of heavy horse's hooves broke the silence. After a few moments the postman, sweat-spots brilliant on his forehead, lumbered into the bar and, ignoring Xandy, called for a drink. To the publican he said : " I'll have the law on him ! My bees are gone mad through the sky."

The publican grunted non-committally and turned to draw the drink. The postman took his seat in a sunny corner beside Xandy.

Presently the lock-and-miss of a rusty bike was heard ; the tailor, hobbling in, glared at his rival and in his turn called out for a drink. He took his seat on the stool at the near side of Xandy, who, with his drink set securely on the seat beside him, was idly piercing the lid of his match-box with a snapped-off match. Once as a small weak wing emerged from the box it immediately became dowered with the memory of a vanished rainbow. Whistling idly, Xandy carefully poked the wing back into the box.

The postman cleared his throat in a manner that was a blow in the face to the tailor. Answering the challenge, the tailor hawked furiously in the deeps of *his* throat. The pair of men then eyed one another directly. As on a signal they set their drinks aside. Significantly the publican took up a mallet which he used for tapping barrels of stout and balancing it on one of its points on the high counter said truculently : " If one o' ye as much as mentions the word *bees* he'll have me to reckon with ! "

Xandy flicked his grey hat upwards and began brightly : " Aristotle was the wisest man who ever lived. Three things there were that went beyond his comprehension : the movement of the tides, the mind of a woman, and the laws and regulations obtaining amongst bees."

With a spurt of angry interest, the tailor and the postman glanced up. The publican's hand tightened around the mallet handle.

Xandy took a sip from his glass and then went on : " To me these things are an open book. Tides hang on the moon's pull, and a woman while she scorns flattery is flawed by nature to yield to it in the animal moment . . ." He broke off abruptly.

" The bees ? " the publican's wife was prompting from far away in a soft new voice. Xandy flashed his innocent speedwell eyes and said : " That's a question delivered to the proper quarter ! I was given power over bees ! "

" What are you sayin' ? " the publican broke in.

" If I call bees, they answer ! " Xandy said quietly but significantly.

" Answer ? " laughed the publican.

Xandy was tolerant : " First they blacken the sky. When I call them closer, they descend like a tame falcon when he sees swung red meat." Angrily he added, as an aside : " Maybe I was here before ! "

The tailor asked : " Where, under God, were you before ? "

" In this world ! "

The publican broke the tension with a short nervous whinny.

The tailor said eagerly : " Call down *my* bees, travellin'-man, and I'll give you a half-sovereign."

" *My* bees were always free of the Isle of Wight disease," the postman bragged sullenly. " Summon them down to me, stranger, and *I'll* give you a half-sovereign."

Xandy looked smilingly at the publican. " What'll *you* give to see a miracle ? " he inquired.

" A full sovereign," the wife answered from the counter's end.

There was a moment's silence. " Will you break your wife's word ? " Xandy taunted.

" I'll not break her word," the publican said ponderously, " —it's her back I'll break one of these fine night-oes."

His wife's manner in no way indicated fear. The publican took the wagers from the tailor and the postman ; then grunted as he added his own gratuity. By this time other onlookers, young and old, had crowded in the open door. Xandy finished his drink. " Where here'll I order 'em to swarm ? " he asked the publican.

The publican looked fearfully around. With his index finger he then drew a cross on the wet circle the travelling-man's glass had made as it was set down on the over-hanging ledge of the bright counter. " Summon the bees to swarm there," he said.

Xandy took off his hat and with a sharp movement flung it on the seat behind him. Everyone present looked at his clean red hair and his good profile which had hitherto been hidden.

He walked to the counter. " Back ! " he shouted. All backed away. Then, meekly : " I'll mark the cross with something that has my own smell on it," he said, taking the matchbox from his pocket and placing it on the wet cross that diametered the wet ring. Then : " Open the window ! " he ordered.

Grumpily the publican opened the window. The cool air came in, sliding across the warm air of the bar-room. Xandy walked to the

window, where the sunlight illuminated his face. Cupping his hands about his mouth, he shouted: "Bee-e-e-e-s!"

Villagers still continued to enter: they resembled actors entering accurately and silently into the climax of a drama. In the silence that followed an old man shut his hanging lips and, his age affording him the honour of voicing the common thought, said: "Maoilre of the Bees is born again!" This was a reference to a legendary figure called "The King of the Bees" who was reputed to have been re-born once in every century in the Irish countryside.

The delay was long. So long it was that a murmur of incredulity arose among the watchers. This Xandy lopped off by crying out: "Silence! An outrider is coming!"

All eyes were firmly fixed on the sunny window. Suddenly the outrider was seen passing through: fluently it moved in the upper ale-brown air. "By God!" swore the oldster, thereafter clapping together his useless lips.

First the bee essed aimlessly: then with a quick shadow-boxing movement it came sideways over the matchbox where, as it fully experienced the powerful pull of what it contained, it came down like a shot. Every eye-pupil was dilated as with an almost audible plop the insect dropped to the counter and there crept loyally forward towards the red-yellow matchbox.

"One swallow doesn't make a summer!" said the publican, swallowing his Adam's apple.

Xandy did not move his head. "You clown!" he said savagely through his clenched teeth. Then: "Look!"

One—two—three—four bees were in the window! The crowd of gaping watchers drew backwards by a single silent step.

Then it was five—six—ten—twenty bees. Suddenly the loyal satellites came crowding and clouding through in numbers wholly beyond the power of counting. The window-ope was darkened with bees. They came like fistfuls of dark berries flung: or like bubbles breaking on brown hot broth. Dark and angry they came, their instinct powerful as a religion. They seemed to cry out through a terrible silence: We are nothing—the Queen is all! Feed the Queen! Live for the Queen! Fight for the Queen! Die for the Queen! How can ages matter in the glory of the Queen?

Fierce in the attributes of peace, the bees came, God-postulating, purposeful, undistractable, each with his communal and individual message to deliver, each small winged item taut with the inherited lunacy of bee-history. Mauling forward in accurate but joyous jostling, furred, fond and duty-blind they came: water-carriers, pollen-gatherers, framers, varnishers, chemists, sealers, storemen, foragers, undertakers, scavengers, ventilators, makers of wax,

grave-diggers and drones. Giddy and all-ignoring they were: they were joyous and browner than honey itself. They were well-winged, crammed tight with passion, willing and spilling and all the while evidencing such sagacity as momentarily rendered the bee the most glorious of God's creatures and Man a swollen, blundering buffoon. They continued to speak by inference with their communal voice, indicating the plot of living, displaying signals from a far yesterday that was rooted in the age of ages and giving promise of an ample story in tomorrow of the inventions.

The booty-turgid weight of the swarm spilled over to a swallow's nest, grew perilously pendant, then base-heavy, gave indication of a certain crazy elasticity, was integrated and disintegrated, smoked savagely like a dampened bonfire and was all the while absolutely great in so far as it gave continuous proof of sagacity, purpose, team-work, legislation and a terrifying communal power.

"*Live for the Queen! Fight for the Queen! Die for the Queen!*"

In the bright compartment of the bar Xandy sat with the sunlight halving his smiling face. When the swarm was ready, he spoke listlessly, still keeping his eyes upon the bees: "I can hold them no longer! Take them now that they're ripe!"

The tailor licked his lips. "Take 'em, you!" he said in a nervous undertone to his rival.

For answer the postman got up and, keeping his eye fast on the swarm, he drove slumpingly through the knot of watchers.

The tailor then rose and said: "I'll not touch them either." At the door he turned: his lips were ashine with cupidity but his mind was plainly filled with superstition. Wan and silent as ghosts the crowd followed the rivals on to the roadway outside.

Xandy laughed himself and the others out of trance: he looked up at the pretty-shawled girl. "I saw a bee-skep hanging from a doorway up the village," he said. Then: "Will you take a present from me, girl bawn?"

Eagerly the girl nodded. Xandy then lovingly scooped the bees into the market basket which the publican's wife had lined with brown paper. He thrust his fearless hand amid the swarm and, secretly opening the matchbox, allowed the queen to crawl out and be enveloped in loving subjects. The swarm imprisoned, he carefully tied brown paper about the rim of the basket.

"Here!" Xandy said, advancing with his gift. "Bees are blessed—they covered the Sacred Host with wax on Penal Days. They go back through Saint David and Pliny to Virgil the Celt. They'll set a small start to your dowry. Tell them of your undertakings. Tell 'em of the man who first stirs your soul with love. Put one on your husband's scythe-blade as he sets out for the fields—then your cattle will never lack mouthfuls of rich grass."

Smiling strangely, the publican's wife beckoned the pair into her green hallway. Here, even in this remote corner of the country, an aspidistra on the hall-table vouched for pseudo-respectability and here also Lady Butler's grey soldiery was oak-rectangled upon the dark wall. Grasping the girl's forearm, the woman also laid her hand along the travelling-man's arm. Her twitching lips were gone from discipline; the dance-a-dangle of her swing-gold ear-rings and the nerve-flaws on her round plump face continued to cry out to Christ for some obscure commodity her cadaverous husband was failing to supply. "The pair o' ye," she said masterfully, holding them at arm's length. "Small labour it would be to set a roof on the broken cabin. Well, now?"

Xandy looked gratefully at the willing girl. His eyes fell. "The curse o' the road is on me," he said in an unsure voice. Then, as if ignoring the urgency of the subject, he added severely: "A swarm should not be trafficked for nothing! Come now, girl bawn, pay me toll—a pin or a penny—else you'll break the luck that has been born between us. I'm a man who cleaves to the old ways."

Her eyes still downcast, the girl said:- "I'll pay you, friendly man, in the best o'coin." Handing the publican's wife her basket, she shook her hands free of the shawl, then moving forward she kissed the travelling-man fully. As the shawl fell limply on the ground, Xandy's arms tightened around the girl and mastered her. They hung together as though they had their existence in dream. The publican's wife was filled with happiness. At last the girl broke away.

Steeling himself only, Xandy said harshly: "I'll be off now—there's adventure like this at every turn of the road."

"Not like this!"—the publican's wife was speaking in blotched angry tones.

Xandy stood rebuked. "Well, not exactly like this!" he conceded with a thin smile. He turned and, walking firmly through the bar, went out through the shop door. "Your wager!" the publican called after him. Xandy shrugged but did not reply.

Standing at the hall doorway the women watched him go. He passed under the bee-skep, then shrugged himself free of houses and faced for the bluff beyond which outer Ireland lay prone. In later years the women kept reminding one another in secret whispers how his laugh-tilted head had behaved so splendidly as it moved freely against the elements of sea and earth and sky.

* * *

No man is the master in his house if his bedroom is done in pink.

D. BENNETT

DEPARTURE OF EMMA INCH

My wife lay awake thinking about the cook and the dog, because she felt kind of funny about them

by JAMES THURBER

EMMA INCH looked no different from any other middle-aged, thin woman you might glance at in the subway or deal with across the counter of some small store in a country town, and then forget forever. Her hair was drab and unabundant, her face made no impression on you, her voice I don't remember—it was just a voice. She came to us with a letter of recommendation from some acquaintance who knew that we were going to Martha's Vineyard for the summer and wanted a cook. We took her because there was nobody else, and she seemed all right. She had arrived at our hotel in Forty-fifth Street the day before we were going to leave and we got her a room for the night, because she lived way uptown somewhere. She said she really ought to go back and give up her room, but I told her I'd fix that.

Emma Inch had a big scuffed brown suitcase with her, and a Boston bull terrier. His name was Feely. Feely was seventeen years old and he grumbled and growled and snuffled all the time, but we needed a cook and we agreed to take Feely along with Emma Inch, if she would take care of him and keep him out of the way. It turned out to be easy to keep Feely out of the way because he would lie grousing anywhere Emma put him until she came and picked him up again. I never saw him walk. Emma had owned him, she said, since he was a pup. He was all she had in the world, she told us, with a mist in her eyes. I felt embarrassed but not touched. I didn't see how anybody could love Feely.

I didn't lose any sleep about Emma Inch and Feely the night of the day they arrived, but my wife did. She told me next morning that she had lain awake a long time thinking about the cook and her dog, because she felt kind of funny about them. She didn't know why. She just had a feeling that they were kind of funny. When we were all ready to leave—it was about three o'clock in the afternoon, for we had kept putting off the packing—I phoned Emma's room, but she didn't answer.

It was getting late and we felt nervous—the Fall River boat

would sail in about two hours. We couldn't understand why we hadn't heard anything from Emma and Feely. It wasn't until four o'clock that we did. There was a small rap on the door of our bedroom and I opened it and Emma and Feely were there, Feely in her arms, snuffing and snaffling, as if he had been swimming a long way.

My wife told Emma to get her bag packed, we were leaving in a little while. Emma said her bag *was* packed, except for her electric fan, and she couldn't get that in. "You won't need an electric fan at the Vineyard," my wife told her. "It's cool there, even during the day, and it's almost cold at night. Besides, there is no electricity in the cottage we are going to." Emma Inch seemed distressed. She studied my wife's face. "I'll have to think of something else then," she said. "Mebbe I could let the water run all night."

We both sat down and looked at her. Feely's asthmatic noises were the only sounds in the room for a while. "Doesn't that dog ever stop that?" I asked, irritably.

"Oh, he's just talking," said Emma. "He talks all the time, but I'll keep him in my room and he won't bother you none."

"Doesn't he bother you?" I asked.

"He *would* bother me," said Emma, "at night, but I put the electric fan on and keep the light burning. He don't make so much noise when it's light, because he don't snore. The fan kind of keeps me from noticing him. I put a piece of cardboard, like, where the fan hits it and then I don't notice Feely so much. Mebbe I could let the water run in my room all night instead of the fan."

I said "Hmmm" and got up and mixed a drink for my wife and me—we had decided not to have one till we got on the boat, but I thought we'd better have one now. My wife didn't tell Emma there would be no running water in her room at the Vineyard.

"We've been worried about you, Emma," I said. "I phoned your room but you didn't answer."

"I never answer the phone," said Emma, "because I always get a shock. I wasn't there anyways. I couldn't sleep in that room. I went back to Mrs. McCoy's on Seventy-eighth Street."

I lowered my glass. "You went back to Seventy-eighth Street last *night*?" I demanded.

"Yes, sir," she said. "I had to tell Mrs. McCoy I was going away and wouldn't be there any more for a while—Mrs. McCoy's the landlady. Anyways, I never sleep in a hotel." She looked around the room. "They burn down," she told us.

It came out that Emma Inch had not only gone back to Seventy-eighth Street the night before but had walked all the way, carrying

Feely. It had taken her an hour or two, because Feely didn't like to be carried very far at a time, so she had had to stop every block or so and put him down on the sidewalk for a while. It had taken her just as long to walk back to our hotel, too; Feely, it seems, never got up before afternoon—that's why she was so late. She was sorry. My wife and I finished our drinks, looking at each other, and at Feely.

Emma Inch didn't like the idea of riding to Pier 14 in a taxi, but after ten minutes of cajoling and pleading she finally got in. "Make it go slow," she said. We had enough time, so I asked the driver to take it easy. Emma kept getting to her feet and I kept pulling her back onto the seat. "I never been in an automobile before," she said. "It goes awful fast." Now and then she gave a little squeal of fright. The driver turned his head and grinned. "You're O.K. wit' me, lady," he said. Feely growled at him. Emma waited until he had turned away again, and then she leaned over to my wife and whispered. "They all take cocaine," she said. Feely began to make a new sound—a kind of high, agonized yelp. "He's singing," said Emma. She gave a strange little giggle, but the expression of her face didn't change.

"I wish you had put the Scotch where we could get at it," said my wife.

If Emma Inch had been afraid of the taxicab, she was terrified by the *Priscilla* of the Fall River Line. "I don't think I can go," said Emma. "I don't think I could get on a boat. I didn't know they were so big." She stood rooted to the pier, clasping Feely. She must have squeezed him too hard, for he screamed—he screamed like a woman. We all jumped. "It's his ears," said Emma. "His ears hurt."

We finally got her on the boat, and once aboard, in the salon, her terror abated somewhat. Then the three parting blasts of the boat whistle rocked Lower Manhattan. Emma Inch leaped to her feet and began to run, letting go of her suitcase (which she had refused to give up to a porter) but holding onto Feely. I caught her just as she reached the gangplank. The ship was on its way when I let go of her arm.

It was a long time before I could get Emma to go to her stateroom, but she went at last. It was an inside stateroom, and she didn't seem to mind it. I think she was surprised to find that it was like a room, and had a bed and a chair and a wash-bowl. She put Feely down on the floor.

"I think you'll have to do something about the dog," I said. "I think they put them somewhere and you get them when you get off."

"No, they don't," said Emma.

I guess, in this case, they didn't. I don't know. I shut the door on Emma Inch and Feely, and went away. My wife was drinking straight Scotch when I got to our stateroom.

The next morning, cold and early, we got Emma and Feely off the *Priscilla* at Fall River and over to New Bedford in a taxi and onto the little boat for Martha's Vineyard. Each move was as difficult as getting a combative drunken man out of the night club in which he fancies he has been insulted. Emma sat in a chair on the Vineyard boat, as far away from sight of the water as she could get, and closed her eyes and held onto Feely. She had thrown a coat over Feely, not only to keep him warm but to prevent any of the ship's officers from taking him away from her.

I went in from the deck at intervals to see how she was. She was all right, or at least all right for her, until five minutes before the boat reached the dock at Woods Hole, the only stop between New Bedford and the Vineyard. Then Feely got sick. Or at any rate Emma said he was sick. He didn't seem to me any different from what he always was—his breathing was just as abnormal and irregular. But Emma said he was sick. There were tears in her eyes. "He's a very sick dog, Mr. Thurman," she said. "I'll have to take him home." I knew by the way she said "home" what she meant. She meant Seventy-eighth Street.

The boat tied up at Woods Hole and was motionless and we could hear the racket of the deck hands on the dock loading freight. "I'll get off here," said Emma, firmly, or with more firmness, anyway, than she had shown yet. I explained to her that we would be home in half an hour, that everything would be fine then, everything would be wonderful. I said Feely would be a new dog. I told her people sent sick dogs to Martha's Vineyard to be cured. But it was no good. "I'll have to take him off here," said Emma. "I always have to take him home when he is sick." I talked to her eloquently about the loveliness of Martha's Vineyard and the nice houses and the nice people and the wonderful accommodations for dogs. But I knew it was useless. I could tell by looking at her. She was going to get off the boat at Woods Hole.

"You really can't do this," I said, grimly, shaking her arm. Feely snarled weakly. "You haven't any money and you don't know where you are. You're a long way from New York. Nobody ever got from Woods Hole to New York alone." She didn't seem to hear me. She began walking towards the stairs leading to the gangplank, crooning to Feely.

"You'll have to go all the way back on boats," I said, "or else take a train, and you haven't any money. If you are going to be so stupid and leave us now, I can't give you any money." "I

don't want any money, Mr. Thurman," she said. "I haven't earned any money." I walked along in irritable silence for a moment; then I gave her some money. I made her take it.

We got to the gangplank.

Feely snaffled and gurgled. I saw now that his eyes were a little red and moist. I knew it would do no good to summon my wife—not when Feely's health was at stake.

"How do you expect to get home from here?" I almost shouted at Emma Inch as she moved down the gangplank. "You're way out on the end of Massachusetts."

She stopped and turned round. "We'll walk," she said. "We like to walk, Feely and me." I just stood still and watched her go.

When I went up on deck, the boat was clearing for the Vineyard. "How's everything?" asked my wife. I waved a hand in the direction of the dock. Emma Inch was standing there, her suitcase at her feet, her dog under one arm, waving goodbye to us with her free hand. I had never seen her smile before, but she was smiling now.

* * *

INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY

The firm's managing director needed a new secretary, and decided to have applicants judged by a psychologist. Three girls were interviewed together.

"What do two and two make?" the psychologist asked the first.

"Four," was the prompt answer. To the same question the second girl replied: "It might be twenty-two." The third girl answered: "It might be twenty-two and it might be four."

When the girls had left the room, the psychologist turned triumphantly to the managing director.

"There," he said, "that's what psychology does. The first girl said the obvious thing. The second smelled a rat. The third was going to have it both ways. Now, which girl will you have?"

The managing director did not hesitate. "I'll have the blonde with the blue eyes," he said.

APRIL GARLAND

Now the full-throated daffodils,
Our trumpeters in gold,
Call resurrection from the ground
And bid the year be bold

C. DAY LEWIS

I will bind the white violet and the gentle narcissus with myrtles, laughing lilies and the soft crocus; and I will bind with them the dark-blue hyacinth and the amorous rose so that the garland about the temples of myrrh-tressed Heliodora may strew flowers on her bright loose hair.

MELEAGER OF GADARA, *translated by* RICHARD ALDINGTON

Pale Primrose . . .

PERENNIAL : how could it fail
To grow?
Appearing like a breath of peace,
Fragile and delicate, and showing
Within its simple face
Such grace as could not show
Were it not rained upon by Heaven's tears.

It used to grow here every year :
Yes. I can still remember how it felt
To pick and with what innocence it smelt.

HARO HODSON, *The Visitor*

Festal Hawthorn . . .

And it was indeed a hawthorn, but one whose flowers were pink, and lovelier even than the white. It, too, was in holiday attire, for one of those days which are the only true holidays, the holy days of religion, because they are not appointed by any capricious accident, as secular holidays are appointed, upon days which are not specially ordained for such observances, which have nothing about them which is essentially festal—but it was attired even more richly than the rest, for the flowers which clung to its branches, one above another, so thickly as to leave no part of the tree undecorated, like the tassels wreathed about the crook of a rococo shepherdess, were every one of them 'in colour,' and consequently of a superior quality, by the

æsthetic standards of Combray, to the ' plain', if one was to judge by the scale of prices at the ' stores ' in the Square, or at Camus's, where the most expensive biscuits were those whose sugar was pink.

And for my own part I set a higher value on cream cheese when it was pink, when I had been allowed to tinge it with crushed strawberries. And these flowers had chosen precisely the colour of some edible and delicious thing, or of some exquisite addition to one's costume for a great festival, which colours, inasmuch as they make plain the reason for their superiority, are those whose beauty is most evident to the eyes of children, and for that reason must always seem more vivid and more natural than any other tints, even after the child's mind has realised that they offer no gratification for the appetite, and have not been selected by the dressmaker . . .

High up on the branches, like so many of those tiny rose-trees, their pots concealed in jackets of paper lace, whose slender stems rise in a forest from the altar on the greater festivals, a thousand buds were swelling and opening, paler in colour, but each disclosing as it burst, as at the bottom of a cup of pink marble, its blood-red stain, and suggesting even more strongly than the full-blown flowers the special, irresistible quality of the hawthorn-tree, which, wherever it budded, wherever it was about to blossom, could bud and blossom in pink flowers alone.

MARCEL PROUST, *Remembrance Of Things Past, translated by* C. K. SCOTT MONCRIEFF

White Petals . . .

Spring goeth all in white,
Crowned with milk-white may :
In fleecy flocks of light
O'er heaven the white clouds stray.

White butterflies in the air ;
White daisies prank the ground :
The cherry and hoary pear
Scatter their snow around.

ROBERT BRIDGES

Glowing Violet . . .

Every tiny rill of water was fringed with violet leaves—you can imagine how in the spring the scent of the violets greets you out in the desert when you are still far away, like a hospitable friend coming open-armed down his steps to welcome you.

GERTRUDE BELL, *Persian Pictures*

Columbine and Lily . . .

Bring hether the Pincke and purple Cullambine,
With Gelliflowres ;
Bring Coronations, and Sops-in-wine
Worn of Paramoures :
Strowe me the ground with Daffadowndillies,
And Cowslips, and Kingcups, and lovèd Lillies :
The pretie Pawnce,
And the Chevisaunce,
Shall match with the fayre flowre Delice.

EDMUND SPENSER, 1552–1599

Flowering Cherry

There are two sakuranoki, Japanese cherry-trees—those trees whose blossoms . . . are "beyond comparison more lovely than anything Europe has to show." Many varieties are cultivated and loved; those in my garden bear blossoms of the most ethereal pink, a flushed white. When, in spring, the trees flower, it is as though fleeciest masses of cloud faintly tinged by sunset had floated down from the highest sky to fold themselves about the branches. This comparison is no poetical exaggeration; neither is it original: it is an ancient Japanese description of the most marvellous floral exhibition which nature is capable of making. The reader who has never seen a cherry-tree blossoming in Japan cannot possibly imagine the delight of the spectacle. There are no green leaves; these come later: there is only one glorious burst of blossoms, veiling every twig and bough in their delicate mist; and the soil beneath each tree is covered deep out of sight by fallen petals as by a drift of pink snow.

LAFCADIO HEARN, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*

. . . O'er The Enamell'd Green

The earth's coat is the green of young willows
Beside brown streams.
It is embroidered over with flowering trees—
Plum, peach and apricot.
Her sleeves are delicately scented.
Her hair is unbound in the wind.
Even the moon is so enamoured
That before dusk he climbs the stairs of heaven to
behold her.

ELIZABETH COATSWORTH, *Fox Footprints*

UNEASY HOME-COMING

The feeling she had was simply a dislike of being alone, and yet . . .

by WILL F. JENKINS

CONNIE began to have the feeling of dread and uneasiness in the taxi but told herself it was not reasonable. She dismissed it decisively when she reached the part of town in which all her friends lived. She could stop and spend the evening with someone until Tom got home, but she didn't. She thrust away the feeling as the taxi rolled out across the neck of land beyond most of the houses. The red, dying sun cast long shadows across the road.

So far, their house was the only one that had been built on the other side of the bay. But she could see plenty of other houses as the taxi drew up before the door. Those other houses were across the bay, to be sure, but there was no reason to be upset. She was firm with herself.

The taxi stopped and the last thin sliver of crimson sun went down below the world's edge. Dusk was already here. But everything looked perfectly normal. The house looked neat and hospitable, and it was good to be back. She paid the taxi driver and he obligingly put her suitcases inside the door. The uneasy feeling intensified as he left. But she tried not to heed it.

It continued while she heard the taxi moving away and purring down the road. But it remained essentially the same—a sort of formless restlessness and apprehension—until she went into the kitchen. Then the feeling changed.

She was in the kitchen, with the close smell of a shut-up house about her, when she noticed the change. Her suitcases still lay in the hall where the taxi driver had piled them. The front door was still open to let in fresh air. And quite suddenly, she had an urgent conviction that there was something here that she should notice. Something quite inconspicuous. But this sensation was just as absurd as the feeling she'd had in the taxi.

There was a great silence outside the house. This was dusk, and bird and insect noises were growing fainter. There were no neighbours near to make other sounds.

She turned on the refrigerator, and it began to make a companionable, humming sound. She turned on the water, and it

gushed. But then her queer sensation took a new form. It seemed that every movement produced a noise which advertised her presence, and she felt that there was some reason to be utterly still. And that really was nonsense too.

She glanced into the dining room. She regarded her luggage, still piled in the hall near the open fróntdoor. Everything looked exactly as everything should look when one returns from a two weeks' holiday and one's husband has been away on business at the same time. Tom would get home about midnight. She had spoken to him on the telephone yesterday. He would positively get back in a few hours. So it would be absurd nôt to stay here to greet him. The feeling she had, she decided firmly, was simply a normal dislike of being alone. And she would not be silly.

She glanced around the kitchen. Afterwards she remembered that she had looked straight at the back door without seeing what was there to be seen. She went firmly down the hall. Then she went out of doors to look at her flowers.

The garden looked only a little neglected. The west was a fading, already dim glory of red and gold. She could not see too many details, but the garden was fragrant and appealing in the dusk. She saw the garage—locked and empty, of course, since Tom had the car—and felt a minor urge to go over to it. But she did not. Afterwards the memory of that minor urge made her feel faint. But it was only an idea. She dismissed it.

She smelled the comfortable, weary smells of the late summer evening, which would presently give way to the sharper, fresher scents of night. There was the tiny darting shadow of a bat overhead, black against the dark sapphire sky. It was the time when, for a little space, peace seems to enfold all the world. But the nagging uneasiness persisted even out here.

There was a movement by the garage, but it failed to catch her eye. If she had looked—even if she failed to see the movement—she might still have seen the motor cycle. It did not belong here, but it was leaning against the garage wall as if its owner had ridden it here and leaned it confidentially where it would be hidden from anyone looking across the bay. But Connie noticed nothing. She simply felt uneasy.

She found herself going nervously back towards the house. The sunset colours faded, and presently all would be darkness outside. She heard her footsteps on the gravelled walk. Occasional dry leaves brushed against her feet. It seemed to her that she hurried, which was ridiculous. So she forced herself to walk naturally and resisted an impulse to look about.

That was why she failed to notice the pantry window.

She came to the front of the house. Her heels made clicking sounds on the steps. She felt a need to be very quiet, to hide herself.

Yet she had no reason for fear in anything she actually had noticed. She hadn't seen anything odd about the back door or the pantry window, and she hadn't noticed the motor cycle or the movement by the garage. The logical explanation for her feeling of terror was simply that it was dark and she was alone.

She repeated that explanation as she forced herself to enter the dark front doorway.

She wanted to gasp with relief as she felt for the switch and the lights came on. The dark rooms remaining were more terrifying then than the night outside. So she went all over the ground floor, turning on lights, and tried not to think of going upstairs. There was no one within call and no one but the taxi driver even knew that she was here. Anything could happen.

But she did not know of anything to cause danger either.

Connie had felt and fought occasional fear before. To bring her nameless frights into the light for scorn, she had talked lightly in the past of the imaginary Things towards which women feel such terror—the Things which nervous women believe are following them ; the Things imagined to be hiding in cupboards and behind dark trees in deserted streets. But her past scorn failed to dispel her terror now. She tried to be angry with herself because she was being as silly as the neurotic female who cannot sleep unless she looks under her bed at night. But still, Connie could not drive herself to go upstairs or to look under her own bed right now.

It was an unfortunate omission.

In the lighted living room she had the feeling of someone staring at her from the dark outside. It was unbearable. She went to the telephone, absolutely certain that there was nothing wrong. But if she talked to someone—

She called Mrs. Winston. It was not a perfect choice. Mrs. Winston was not nearly of Connie's own age, but Connie felt so sorry for the older woman that when she needed comfort she often instinctively called her. Talking to someone else who needed comforting always seemed to make one's own troubles go away.

Mrs. Winston's voice was bright and cheery over the phone. " My dear Connie ! How nice it is that you're back with us ! "

Connie felt better instantly. She felt herself relaxing, she heard her voice explaining that she'd had a lovely holiday and that Tom was coming back tonight and—

Mrs. Winston said anxiously, " I do hope your house is all right, Connie. Is it ? It's been dreadful here ! Did you hear ? "

" Not a word since I left," said Connie. " What's happened ? "

She expected to hear about someone having been unkind to

Charles, who was Mrs. Winston's only son. He gave Connie the creeps, but she could feel very sorry for his mother. He had a talent for getting into trouble. There'd been a girl when he was only sixteen, he had been caught stealing in school when there was no excuse for it, and he'd been expelled from college and nowadays wore an apologetic air. Mrs. Winston tried to believe that he was simply having a difficult time growing up. But he was already twenty, and at twenty a hulking young man with an apologetic air and a look of always thinking of something else—one could sympathize with his mother and still feel uncomfortable about him.

Mrs. Winston's voice went on explaining. And the feeling of terror came back upon Connie like a blow.

There had been a series of burglaries in the town. The Hamiltons' house had been ransacked while they were out for an evening's bridge. The Blairs' house was looted while they were away. The Smithsons'. The Tourneys'. And Saddler's shop was robbed, and the burglars seemed to know exactly where Mr. Saddler kept his day's receipts and took them and the tray of watches and fountain pens and the cameras. And poor Mr. Field—

Mr. Field was the ancient cashier at Saddler's. He had interrupted the burglars, and they had beaten him horribly, leaving him for dead. He never had regained consciousness and it was not believed now at the hospital that he ever would.

Connie said from a dry throat, "I wish you hadn't told me that tonight. I'm all alone. Tom won't be back until midnight."

"But my dear," Mrs. Winston exclaimed, "you mustn't. I'll locate Charles and have him come for you right away! You can spend the evening here, and he can take you back when—"

Connie shook her head at the telephone. "Oh, no! That would be silly!"

She heard her voice refusing, and her mind protested the refusal. But Charles made her flesh crawl. She could not bear to think of him driving her through the darkness. Baseless terror was bad enough, she thought, without actual aversion besides.

"I'm quite all right!" she insisted. "Quite! I do hope Mr. Field gets better, but I'm all right . . ."

When she hung up the phone she was aware that she was sick. But it was startling to discover that her knees were physically weak when she started to move from the instrument. She could telephone someone else, and they would come for her. But Mrs. Winston would be offended and take it as an affront. And Connie was still sure that her fear was quite meaningless. It was just a feeling.

She moved aimlessly away from the telephone, found herself at the foot of the stairs. Then she looked up at the dark above

and wanted to whimper. But a saving fury came to her. She would not yield to groundless fear. She was in terror of—she called it burglars now, but actually it was of Them, the unknown men women are taught to fear as dangerous.

"Ridiculous!" Connie told herself.

She got a suitcase and started for the stairs. It was deep night now. If she looked out—say, at the garage—she would see nothing. Somewhere there was a dismal cooing. Doves.

She climbed the stairs into darkness. Nothing happened. She pressed a switch and the passage sprang into light. She breathed again. She went into Tom's and her bedroom. There was dust on the dressing table. There was an ash tray. She put down the suitcase and was conscious of bravery because she was angry.

Then she saw cigarette ends on the rug. Scorched places. Someone had sat here in this bedroom, smoking and indifferently dropping cigarette ends on the rug and crushing them out.

Connie stood with every muscle in her body turned to stone.

A part of Connie's brain directed her eyes again to the bed. Someone had sat on it—only sat—and smoked at leisure. But a corner of the bed-spread was twitched aside. What was under the bed? She found herself backing away from it, into a chair which toppled over. The noise made her freeze.

But nothing happened. There was no change in the companionable hum of the refrigerator downstairs. No reaction to the sound of the overturned chair—which seemed incredible. If one of Them—the nameless Things of which she was in terror now—was under the bed, he would come out at the noise.

Presently—her breathing loud in her own ears—Connie bent and looked under the bed. She had to. None of Them were under it. Of course. But there was an object there which was strange.

A very long time later, Connie dragged it out. It was a bag with bulges in it. Her hands shook horribly, but she dumped its contents on the floor. There were cameras. Silver. Sally Hamilton's necklace and rings. There were watches and fountain pens. This must be what the burglars had taken from the Hamiltons' house and the Blairs' and the Smithsons' and the Tourneys'. The cameras and pens and watches came from Saddler's shop, where Mr. Field had come upon the burglars and they had beaten him almost to death. The burglars had nearly killed him!

Connie went to the bedroom door. Her knees were water. Her house had been used as the hiding place for the loot of the burglaries that had taken place in her absence. But now if they found out she was back—

Without much rationalization, she could guess why Mr. Field had been nearly killed. He must have recognized the burglars.

And now they could look across the bay and see that Connie was home. Wouldn't they know instantly that she would soon find their loot? And that she then would telephone for the police . . . ?

Unless they came and stopped her. Quickly.

Shivering, Connie turned out the light in the bedroom. And in the upstairs hall. Going down the steps, she clung to the rail to keep from falling. Downstairs, she turned out the light in the living room, went quickly to the front door and bolted it. She was leaving it when she thought to fumble her way across the room and make sure that the window was locked. It was. If the lights had been seen across the bay . . . She hastened desperately to turn out the rest. The dining room. Lights out. The windows were locked. The pantry. It was dark. Whimpering, she was afraid to enter it. She flashed on the light to make sure of the window.

The window was broken. A neat jagged section of glass was missing. It had been cracked and removed so that someone could reach in and unlock it. It was now impossible to lock; anyone could reach in and unfasten it again.

Connie snapped off the light and fled into the kitchen and made that dark. But as the bulb dimmed she realized what she had seen in the very act of snapping the light switch. The back door was not fully closed. Its key was missing. There was mud on the floor where someone had come in—more than once. The burglars must have made casual, constant use of the house.

She stood panting in the blackness. Somewhere outside, frogs croaked. There was a thump, and her heart stood still until she realized that a night-flying insect had bumped against the window.

The refrigerator cut off.

It was coincidence, of course, but it was shocking. The proper thing, the logical thing, was to go to the telephone now. She could not see to dial, but somehow she must.

She felt her way blindly to the instrument. Her fingers on the wall made whispering sounds that guided her and she became aware of the loud pounding sound her heart made.

Just as she reached the telephone there was a faint noise which might have been a footstep in the garden.

She waited, filled with such fear that her body did not seem to exist and she had no physical sensation at all.

But a part of her brain saw with infinite despair that if the burglars had been near the house at sunset, intending to enter it as soon as darkness fell, they would have seen the taxi deliver her. They would have known that sooner or later she would discover proof of their presence. And what she had just done told them of her discovery! The light in the bedroom where their loot was hidden turned out . . . Every other light turned out. They would know

she had darkened the house to hide in it, to use the telephone.

There was a soft sound at the back door. It squeaked.

Connie stood rigid. The clicking of the dial would tell everything. She could not conceivably summon help.

There was the soft whisper of a foot on the kitchen linoleum. Connie's hands closed convulsively. The one thought that came to her now was that she must breathe quietly.

There was a grey glow somewhere. The figure in the kitchen was throwing a torch beam on the floor. Then it halted, waiting. He knew that she was hiding somewhere in the house.

He went almost soundlessly into the living room. She saw the glow of the light there. Back into the kitchen. She heard him moving quietly—listening—towards the door through which she had come only a few seconds before to use the telephone.

He came through that door, within three feet of her. But when he was fully through the doorway she was behind him. Again he flashed the light downwards. But he did not think to look behind him. By just so much she was saved for the moment.

In the greyish light reflected from the floor she recognized him.

He went into the dining room. He moved very quietly, but he bumped ever so slightly against a chair. The noise made her want to shriek. He was hunting her, and he knew that she was in the house and he had to kill her. He had to get his loot and get away, and she must not be able to tell anything about him.

He was back in the kitchen again. He stood there, listening, and Connie was aware of a new and added emotion which came of her recognition of him. She felt that she would lie down at any instant and scream—because she knew him!

He came towards the door again, but he went up the stairs. They creaked under his weight. He must have reasoned cunningly that she would want to hide, because she was afraid. So he would go into the bedroom and look under the bed . . .

Connie slipped her feet out of her slippers. He had not reached the top of the stairs before she stood in her stockinged feet in the blackness below.

The front door was impossible. She would have to unlock it, make a noise. But he had not closed the back door behind him.

She crept out of it, with a passionate care that almost vanished when she was in the blessed night. There were stars. She remembered that she must not step on the gravel on which her feet might make a noise, so she stepped on the grass. And she fled.

There were sounds inside the house. He was opening cupboards, deliberately making sounds to fill her with panic as he hunted her down. He hadn't guessed yet that she was outside.

There were shrubs by the garage, so she slowed her flight to

avoid them. And then she came upon the motor cycle. She smelled it, oil and petrol and rubber. It was useless to her. She had no idea how to operate it. But suddenly a wild escape occurred to her—the motor cycle wasn't entirely useless.

Connie fumbled with the machine. She turned a little tap. The smell of petrol grew strong. There was a crash inside the house. But outside the night was full of stars, and the air was cool and sweet —except that the smell of petrol was growing stronger in it.

Connie had a box of matches in her pocket. Quickly she got it out, and in one motion struck a match and dropped it and ran away into the darkness, with the strange feel of grass under her feet.

The petrol blazed fiercely. She hid herself in the shadows and watched, sobs trying to form in her throat. The fire would be seen across the bay. It would plainly be at Connie's house. People would come quickly—a lot of them. And fire engines.

As the flames grew higher, she saw the figure plunge from the house, run furiously towards the fire, try to flail it out. But it was impossible.

And he knew it. Even his twisted mind would tell him that nothing could hide his identity now. The motor cycle would be identification enough, and there was the loot in the house.

Connie found herself weeping. It was partly relief. But it was also the unnerving realization that the fears she'd had about Them, the men who prey on others, were not entirely groundless.

The headlights of cars began to focus towards the house, along the road from the mainland. The bells of fire engines started tolling and grew louder. And in the leaping flames surrounding the motor cycle, a hulking, desperate figure threw futile handfuls of earth upon the machine. Was he, Connie wondered, trying to create the hopeless pretence that he was the first to help ?

Even so, she was quite safe now, Connie knew. She began to cry in reaction from her terror. But, also, she wept heartbrokenly for poor Mrs. Winston. She, Connie, could have been murdered. She could have been the victim of one of those twisted men who prey on their fellow beings. But she wept for Mrs. Winston.

She, Connie, would not now be one of the women They had killed. But Mrs. Winston was the mother of one of Them.

* * *

RUDIMENTARY

This is all we ever say :
Ego, mei, mihi, me.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

CH'IAO-CHIAO AND THE BANDIT

After the distressing event the lady smiled more frequently, and with perhaps more reason

by LESLIE BONNET

"A THUMB of refined appearance," said Wong, "was not easy to obtain in this rough mountain region."

He paused and breathed heavily. He was flung back in his chair in an indecorous pose. He was too big for a true Chinese and much too hirsute. A rude black beard sprouted with barbarian vigour from his coarse chops. The hand that gestured unnecessarily was repellently hairy.

"You have been more than helpful," his companion hastened to interpose.

Wong did not acknowledge the compliment. He went on, moodily, "And when it came to the matter of a great toe; it must be confessed that men yield up great toes with unfeigned reluctance."

"Agreed. Agreed," said Chang Yu-Ch'un quickly.

"These matters cost much trouble and money."

"Ayee-ah. 'Tis true," sighed Chang. His pale, dissipated face glowed moistly in the soft beams of the single rape oil lamp.

"And when we have got our thumb. And when we have got our great toe," growled Wong. "And when we have dealt with them exactly as instructed. And when nothing happens. When there is no result at all. Then one is bound to ask oneself, 'What now?'"

Chang Yu-Ch'un showed no resentment of such coarse directness of speech. He sat forward, sensitive fingers pressed to his brow, blue robe glinting in the unsteady light.

"You have been more than kind, fearless Wong," he said at last. "I am driven to the conclusion that my honoured wife is even less sensitive to the thought of my sufferings than I would have supposed possible."

"Ah!" said Wong. "Ah!"

Why was this ill-assorted pair lurking in the cold early spring in a damp and uncomfortable cavern in the region of the Great Snow Mountains?

Let it be told.

Wong was just a bandit chief, one of many in this area between China and Tibet. The Emperor's authority lay heavily on the rich plains; but rested lightly and only at intervals where the mountain ramparts began. And there Wong plied his trade of banditry conscientiously, with diligence; but without conspicuous success.

Chang was a wealthy silk merchant of Kwanhsien, a walled city about one day's journey from where these twain now lurked.

Some ten years before this, Chang had married Ch'iao-chiao, the daughter of a merchant friend. Ch'iao-chiao was not only a proud beauty; she was also a very superior person.

For five years they had lived in diminishing happiness, and finally Chang fell to beating her in private and reviling her constantly. This course of conduct was necessary because Ch'iao-chiao had borne him no child. And a barren wife is intolerable. At the same time, as a relief from these disciplinary measures, Chang sought the society of sing-song girls in the Street of Diverting Pursuits. He also visited gambling houses, and frequently found in intoxication a release from his sense of having been wronged.

During this time, on one occasion, Chang carelessly gave the lady Ch'iao-chiao permission to be absent to do honour to her ancestors. This involved a journey of two days into the Great Snow Mountain region to the riverside village of Shui Mo Ko.

Ch'iao-chiao went, her strong spirit resentful, not yet broken. She was thankful for this short respite.

On the return journey her little caravan was stopped by one of the bandit gangs in which the region abounded. Ch'iao-chiao was robbed and also—not to use two words where one will do—raped.

So painful a fact would not have been mentioned here had it not a bearing upon the story.

There is an old saying in China, too rudely expressed to be committed to writing, to the effect that in the circumstances in which the lovely Ch'iao-chiao found herself it is permissible, on being thoroughly satisfied that resistance is unavailing, not to participate, of course, but to become, as it were, an interested party.

Whether Ch'iao-chiao recollected this maxim when subjected to strange embraces it is impossible to tell. Suffice to say that she regained Kwanhsien and in a composed manner related to her husband the brutal fact.

The beauty of Ch'iao-chiao consisted, apart from her form itself which was very amiable, in bright black hair and a pale sensitive face. Indeed her pallor was so marked that her flesh seemed to glow with it. She had too a little secret smile which Chang had at first found attractive and later alarming. It was noticeable that after this distressing event she smiled more frequently and with perhaps more reason.

In his relief at her safe return Chang beat her rather more severely than was his wont. Nor did he forget to remark that her recent experience, added to her barrenness, had still further depreciated her value.

And there the matter rested, or would have rested; but for the disquieting fact that Ch'iao-chiao bore, in due course, a son.

The child was of very low-born appearance and was much too hardy to have sprung from refined stock.

But it was not the appearance of the child which was of significance. It was the fact of its arrival. It was now plain that if barrenness there were in the Chang family the barrenness was not on the part of Ch'iao-chiao.

This startling fact upset the whole balance of forces in the Chang home. The high spirited Ch'iao-chiao, so long quailing under a sense of inadequacy, could not now contain herself.

She turned in a most unwomanly way upon the crestfallen Chang. She mocked his lack of virility, she scoffed at his pretensions, she scolded him for his vices.

So great a loss of face, so complete a reversal of fortune was too much for Chang. He wilted. Meekness and cunning replaced arrogance and self will.

It was but a short time before the lady Ch'iao-chiao was supervising Chang's business to such an extent that he became dependent for money with which to solace himself on what his wife chose to dole out to him at long intervals. No longer master in his own home, not even able to escape to the Street of Diverting Pursuits, Chang was now less than the half the man he had always been.

And so it befell that, to gratify his desires and to be able to hold up his head around the city, Chang was often forced to employ unworthy stratagems in order to obtain cash. But such expedients exhaust themselves; and after a twelvemonth of indignities and deprivation Chang at last hit upon a plan of some scope.

He argued that if he could get himself kidnapped his wife would be bound by public opinion to ransom him. She might even be so moved by his peril as to modify the harshness of her attitude to him. All Chang needed was a bandit who would be prepared to do business with him on an agreed division of the proceeds.

And so he cast about for a reliable lawless person. He was eventually put in touch with Wong.

It was Chang's own idea that the first ransom should be accompanied by a human thumb purporting to be his and that the threat should be made that if the money were not immediately forthcoming then Chang's great toe also would be severed and sent. All that Wong had to do was to secure these persuasive tokens from any suitable source.

But the astonishing conduct of the lady Ch'iao-chiao spoiled the plan. She showed no concern when the letters containing the thumb and the great toe were successively delivered to her. She did not appear to care greatly how long or how assiduously the bandits lopped her husband. She returned no answer to the demands.

Which explains why Wong and Chang were debating uneasily in an uncomfortable cavern in the wild country west of Kwanhsien as has already been described.

What, in these circumstances, were the conspirators to do ?

Let that be told, also.

Chang, who was already yearning again for the bright lights, broke the sad silence.

" We cannot, brave one," he said, " stay longer inactive, in this ill-situated cavern. Let us therefore disguise ourselves and venture down to the city. In three days' time there is the ceremony of the Opening of the Waters and many visitors will be in Kwanhsien, and we may go unnoticed. If we speak little and listen much we may find out what is at the bottom of this matter and so help ourselves."

" In truth," blurted Wong, " I would do anything to get my money. Let us therefore be gone at dawn," and he clapped his hands noisily for food and wine.

So on the morrow, in the guise of charcoal bearers, the pair departed for Kwanhsien.

They threaded the narrow path that winds above the blue Min river, Wong, his great frame braced bravely to the load, Chang, his face blackened, limping along on tired feet and crying out at the hardness of the way.

The light was going as they came in sight of the city wall and the spirit lanterns were being lit ; but they were in good time. The gate was still open.

It so happened that year that a high official of the Imperial Court was to visit Kwanhsien to assist at the Opening of the Waters. As a result the Chief of Police was ordered by the Board of Punishments to tidy up the city. This consisted of clapping everyone who was not of prosperous or cheerful appearance into jail.

So, as has been said, Wong and Chang were in good time. As soon as they appeared at the West Gate they were seized and conducted with little ceremony to the Prison of Inconveniences.

There the head jailer, who had had a busy day, could not spare time to attend to them. He could only have them soundly beaten and defer administration details until the morrow.

Cold and aching, Wong and Chang slept ill. Wong regretted in a loud voice that he had ever been tempted away from the path of

straightforward banditry. Chang gave quieter utterance to a whole catalogue of regrets.

In the morning they were dragged before the chief jailer. He sat in the main hall, biting his nails and chewing sunflower seeds.

"Who are these hangdog creatures?" he shouted, spitting noisily.

Wong replied submissively that he was a poor charcoal porter from Shwang Ko.

Chang asserted that he was surnamed Chang and named Yu Ch'un, a merchant living in the Street of the Hat Makers, and a person of some substance.

"Beat that one," roared the chief jailer.

Lamentable circumstance! "That one" was Chang.

He was brought back writhing.

"I sent for you both," said the chief jailer in a business-like tone, "in order that you might have opportunity to give the usual presents."

With tears in their eyes they both protested poverty.

The argument did not seem to weigh with the chief jailer.

"Beat them," he ordered.

And so for several days they sojourned thus in considerable discomfort.

Finally, by sheer importunity and at the price of many kicks, Chang won the chief jailer's ear, and the tyrant agreed to have a message conveyed to the lady Ch'iao-chiao in the Street of the Hat Makers.

After an interminable time the messenger returned. The two prisoners could hear the chief jailer roaring. Chang looked wistfully at the great hairy frame of his associate and, for the first time, wished he had it.

The jailer stamped to the corner where they lay, seized Chang's hands and feet, examined them closely, and then threw him aside with a snort of relief.

"The lady Ch'iao-chiao says that her husband has a thumb and a great toe missing," he said with a sneer.

"Take that one and beat him soundly."

"That one" was Chang, again.

And so they abode, abandoned.

But after many days the lady Ch'iao-chiao sent for her steward. For one who knows seven parts of a matter may grasp the whole.

"I believe," she said, "that your honourable master is by some mischance in the Prison of Inconveniences. Take this silver and seek out my lord. If he is indeed there treat with the head jailer that my lord may be well cared for. And promise the jailer more silver so that my lord may be released in a little time."

The steward bowed to withdraw; but the lady Ch'iao-chiao stayed him.

"One thing more. There is some companion with my lord. Observe this man straightly. He will be some evil man of the city. Give this other silver to the chief jailer and request that he devise some torments for this fellow."

The steward went and the lady Ch'iao-chiao waited, the high light from the garden lattice glinting on her piled black hair, her dark phœnix eyes downcast, her delicate features faintly stirred by thought.

The steward came back. The light had faded in the garden. In the dimness the lady Ch'iao-chiao glowed in a jade green robe. She signed to the steward to speak.

"It was indeed my lord Chang," he said, "in a state very pitiful. I am to go in the morning to accept him at the jailer's hands."

The lady Ch'iao-chiao smiled approval.

"And the rascal with him?" she asked. "Is he to receive the personal attentions of the head jailer?"

"He is indeed, honoured madam. Even as I left, the head jailer was studying his book of torments."

"Good. Did you know the man? Is he from this city?"

"No, honoured lady. He was a great hairy brute of a man, very shocking to see. With nasty black sprouting whiskers and long hairy arms."

"A bandit?" she asked faintly.

"Undoubtedly, my honoured lady."

The lady Ch'iao-chiao was on her feet, tapping her chin with her fan—"A bandit, with nasty black sprouting whiskers—and long hairy arms? Go back swiftly. Take this silver more. And beg the jailer to set this great hairy devil free . . ."

* * *

UNIVERSAL

When, on a slow and dirty train in New England, I first picked up *Planetary Comics*, I made the interesting discovery that on every planet—those known to mere science and the many more known to comic science—the climate, the flora and fauna, and the political organisation might differ, but there was always a supply of shapely young women in exiguous two-piece garments.

D. W. BROGAN, *in the "Spectator"*

DEBT OF HONOUR

For this remote warrior-tribe he had already given up much—he was willing to give still more

by GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

IT was not in the nature of the Bagai to weep. Their training, like that of the district commissioner now standing by the loaded lorry which was to take him from them to the coast, forbade the expression of emotion in public. Dark eyes stared over the deep breathing line of the giraffe-hide shields. The district commissioner stared back without a word. To a stranger it would have seemed that the Bagai were parting with their most hated enemy, for he would have known nothing of the long councils, the swearings of blood brotherhood, the agony of old men who had come, alone in the night, terrified for their people's future in a changing world, as children whose father should be compelled, without hope of return, to leave them.

Overhead the clouds wallowed lazily up from the Indian Ocean, rolling westward through the grey morning like a herd of leisurely Bagai cattle towards the Bagai hills. The faint, deep lowing of thunder echoed from the edge of the escarpment where the spears of sun, radiant as in the steel engraving of some family Bible, pierced through a screen of straight-falling rain. To north and south the clouds were spreading into the heart of Africa without shedding any of their burden upon farms of white men and parched clearings of black. It was the copper-coloured Bagai who had all the luck.

The warriors, their backs towards their country and the long-needed rain, paid no heed to this good fortune. At such a crisis in the little nation's life, pasture and crops were irrelevant. Grief—collective, overwhelming grief—obsessed them. Yet their only gesture of farewell was the silent stare, answered, and for the same Spartan reasons, by the lonely man standing at the side of his lorry. They had no royal salute with which to send Mark Lee-Armour on his way, for they had no kings. No slaying of men or cattle could appease their sorrow, for they had no tradition of sacrifice.

The two officials, one of state and one of church, who accompanied Lee-Armour effaced themselves from the scene so far as dignity permitted, standing apart from the austere leave-taking with the delicacy of those who are present at a friend's parting from

his beloved wife. One was the new district commissioner of the Bagai ; the other was the archdeacon of the Sultanates who had been on tour through the diocese and was seizing the opportunity of Lee-Armour's departure to travel down with him to the coast.

The vigil of grief ended, sharply and by almost telepathic consent between Mark Lee-Armour and his Bagai. He climbed into the cab of the loaded lorry and drove off. The new district commissioner, after a few halting words of promise and sympathy to the Bagai, mounted his pony and rode away. The archdeacon's black and gaudy driver followed the lorry, playing hosannas on his horn ; he wore a clerical collar, as self-chosen badge of office, above the open neck of his yellow shirt, and he despised the uncivilized. The warriors themselves stood still, eyes raised to the mist of dust that hung, until it merged with the westward-flowing clouds, above the narrow road of rammed mud.

The archdeacon watched the swaying, uncompromising back of the lorry, a blind wall against farewells, and envied this departing district commissioner his life of devoted service to his neighbours. It was the life for which he himself, with half his being, had longed as a young man. The other half, however, had demanded from him a still higher service. Africa had happily integrated the two.

He was of the caste of the colonial officials, of their dress—at any rate when on tour—and even of their build, except for a slight ecclesiastical portliness ; but, unlike these younger sons of empire, he had no material need to make a career in Africa. Even the missionaries had to admit—however strictly they preserved their charity for their converts—that a man of his fortune and family who had chosen a droughty diocese of three million square miles rather than the fat lawns of an English cathedral close could not be wholly worldly. They were also glad that his cheque book was as wide open as any apostle's money bag.

He had looked forward to the journey. To pass three days and nights in sole company with greatness would be a memorable experience. Yet when the sun had gone down and the scrub thorn around the camp was black lace against a crimson sky, the confiding dusk was full of disappointment.

Lee-Armour never came out of the shadows. In a physical sense, as well, that was true. He followed as any shy animal the pattern and contours of darkness, and after supper—an unrevealing interlude as well-bred as any formal dinner party—while they sat and smoked by the fire, his face was always half obscured by the straight column of smoke or caught at evasive angles by any sudden spurt of flame. The archdeacon assumed that the cause of this reserve was just unhappiness. He knew that Lee-Armour's heart was still on the Bagai plateau, and would remain there, perhaps

for years, until some other helpless people won his second and calmer love.

For three long days of travel and camp there was no getting close to the man. His courtesy, his solicitude for his companion's comfort were beyond reproach, but he himself seemed to be writhing in some abyss which he did not dare to have others contemplate or to contemplate himself. Only once did he show any emotion, and that was when the archdeacon referred to the religion of the Bagai.

"Little and uncomplicated," said Lee-Armour. "They believe in a sort of collective soul of the people and another collective soul of the cattle. All the rest they leave to professionals."

"Their priests?"

"A family group of witch doctors—if one can call them priests."

"One can," the archdeacon answered cheerfully. "Clergy is clergy the whole world over. Provided always that what they serve is the best they can imagine."

"God knows what they serve!" Lee-Armour exclaimed with sudden bitterness.

"That is just what I meant," said the archdeacon.

When the journey down to the sea was done and Mark Lee-Armour had gone to his hotel—that, too, was odd when there were a dozen officials in the capital, including the governor himself, who would have been delighted to put him up—the archdeacon unlocked his three-room bungalow and spent the night awake and upon his knees. Such was his custom and pleasure on return from the soul-deadening administrative problems of a tour. He looked forward to the long act of worship just as the district commissioner he might so easily have been would have looked forward to his bath and the ice that tinkled in long glasses.

The archdeacon of the Sultanates had much to occupy the long hours of self-questioning, for he knew what was said of him—that he was discouraging to missionaries, that he was a politician, that he cared more for his few powerful white rams than his uncounted flock of black sheep.

He admitted that the accusations were true, and hoped that the motives ascribed to him were wrong. He was not a snob, but certainly he was convinced that no missionary, if it came to the mere measurement of good work, could surpass the utter devotion and Christian selflessness of such administrators as Lee-Armour, and that it was through them he should work.

He arose refreshed, weary only in body, and at breakfast turned to his time-table of work and engagements—an optimistic schedule which he was never allowed to fulfil. It was so that morning. With the toast and marmalade came a message from the governor, begging

him to drop in as soon as possible for a private chat. His imperial self was flattered by so urgent a request, while his other self indulgently smiled at such boyishness.

Governor and archdeacon, as they sat side by side in easy chairs at a significant distance from the official desk, seemed to form the nucleus of a club. They were of the same physical structure, though sedentary life had diverted their bodies, once hard and lean, in two opposite directions. The dark-haired governor was very thin and tall, with an almost professorial stoop ; the archdeacon was fairer and smoother and rounder, as if decorously to fill out the apron which he never wore. He had not avoided those worries which contracted the stomach of the governor ; he had merely placed them in the hands of higher authority than the Colonial Secretary.

"Toby," said the governor—for they were on terms of Christian names—"you travelled down with Mark Lee-Armour. What's wrong with him ?"

"I don't know," the archdeacon answered. "I wish I did."

"Then look at that and tell me what you think," the governor appealed, handing him a letter.

It was an urgent private note from Lee-Armour's successor. It told the governor that the accounts of the Bagai Agricultural Development Fund were twelve hundred pounds short when Lee-Armour handed over, that he had quite calmly admitted the deficit and that he had been unwilling to explain why there were neither vouchers nor receipts. The new commissioner, jealous for the honour of his service, had written unofficially to the governor in the hope that the loss could be adjusted or hushed up before any official cognizance had to be taken of it.

"It can't be true !" the governor exclaimed, exasperated by the certainty that it was.

"He was moved unexpectedly ?" Archdeacon Toby asked.

"Yes. They've got a high commissionership for him when he gets home, and he had only a few weeks' notice. That's the damnable part of it. It looks as if he had been caught short with his fingers in the kitty, and didn't have time to pay the money back. But I don't believe it. I can't believe it. Lee-Armour of all people!"

The district commissioner's reticence during the journey down was convincingly explained. The archdeacon remembered, too, that when he had watched Lee-Armour saying good-bye to his successor, there had been a tension between them which could not wholly be explained by the inevitable feeling of the one that his work would henceforth be in less loving hands, and of the other that he had been given too hard, too individual an example to follow.

"This letter was in the mail he carried down himself ?"

"Yes, of course it was," the governor answered testily.

"That's a pretty good tribute to him from his successor."

"Tribute? Damn his tribute! What does a chap like Lee-Armour want with tribute from any of us? What on earth am I to do, Toby? And with this thing hanging over us, I've got to make a speech at his farewell banquet tonight. And he and I both knowing that the very next day I may have to refuse him permission to leave!"

"He has always played a very lone hand," the archdeacon suggested thoughtfully.

"Well, what of it? What else could he do?"

It was true that for eight years Lee-Armour had surrendered his life, his thoughts, his pleasures and the society of his own kind to the welfare of the Bagai. He spoke not only the Bagai language but the private dialects of the family groups, which were almost separate languages in themselves.

They were not everybody's meat, those cattle-owning warriors who drank cow's blood as a staple diet, and shed human, whenever they were reasonably sure they wouldn't be caught. But those who loved them said they were the only free men left in the world. They looked free. They had an engaging habit of painting golden armour on their deep copper skins, and they plastered their hair with cow dung to resemble—though they did not know it—the graceful head-dress of their far-distant Egyptian ancestors. They still lived a little before the dawn of history. Their cattle and their women shared, as necessary companions, this idleness of paradise.

"And I never heard of a missionary making a single worthwhile convert among 'em," said the governor aggressively, for he was thinking of Lee-Armour and resented all competition with his selfless leadership.

"The Bagai will give us none or all," Archdeacon Toby answered. "And I may live to see the day when we have all."

"What? Those bloodthirsty savages?"

"I expect they said the same to Augustine about the Anglo-Saxons," the archdeacon retorted cheerfully.

Lee-Armour's task had been to begin civilization, while preserving the flavour of the Golden Age. The Bagai knew very well that if you dug the land and planted seeds you could live on the results. But nothing had ever induced them to try the experiment. They despised agriculture as an occupation proper for the thick-lipped black man whose death at the end of a broad Homeric spear barely counted for graduation from youth to warrior—in fact, it didn't count unless carried out with secrecy and craftsmanship, wounds of ingress and egress being checked for neatness by a delegate of the old men's committee.

That was the tribe whom Lee-Armour must persuade to till the soil. It had to be done. The Bagai plateau was over-stocked with cattle, and there was no more land available.

The main reason for Lee-Armour's success was his discovery that, although the Bagai would be ashamed to grow food and eat it, there was an absence of tradition either for or against growing food to sell it—a discovery simple enough, once stated, but demanding three years of patience in mud huts, of standing to a lion's charge with shield and spear, of visits, interested and respectful, to that hill where the hereditary witch doctors preserved—but seldom, even to the old men, expounded—the beliefs and practices of their ancestors.

The result was the much-photographed marketing on the border of the Bagai country. Caravans of government lorries, loaded with sacks of wheat and maize, rolled down from the plateau with chosen warriors sitting on top. The drivers were black, for the Bagai had a truly aristocratic attitude towards engines. A gentleman did not manage such things himself; he employed a chauffeur. Nor did a gentleman haggle over price. He decided it—and remained for a week, if necessary, casually polishing his spear until it was received. Rather than argue, the Bagai had been known in early days to order drivers and loads back to the highlands. For later harvests, however, Lee-Armour learned to persuade the stern and dung-plastered marketing board that the fair price to ask was exactly that which the government intended to pay.

The crops were rich and regular. As the Bagai were starting from scratch, with no bad habits of their own, they did what the agricultural experts told them. And they had the most amazing luck—beginner's luck, the governor called it. Their experimental estates were not as yet very extensive, but the rains never passed them over in the spring; and if there were storms when the corn was in ear, they broke conveniently on the cattle lands or beyond the borders of the Bagai.

"What makes me so wild," said the governor, "is that I have to bust a saint like Lee-Armour for mislaying twelve hundred pounds. What on earth did he need it for? What made him take such a risk?"

"Better ask him."

"Of course I'm going to ask him," the governor fretted. "And I want you here."

"Not I," said Archdeacon Toby.

"You must. I'm not going to expose Lee-Armour even to my own A.D.C. I won't have anyone official in on this yet. But there it is—I don't know what I'm going to run into. He may be mad. I may find myself compounding a felony. There ought to be a witness."

"He'll resent it."

"He won't. He knows as much about this job of mine as I do. He'll realize at once why you are here, and he'll ignore you with the utmost good manners."

The governor resumed his official chair. The archdeacon effaced himself so far as possible in the hot dusk of the shuttered room. He stayed for Lee-Armour's sake rather than the governor's. That amiable and worried bureaucrat wasn't at his best in any situation of human delicacy, and an audience might stimulate him into his most intelligent behaviour.

It did. When the district commissioner came round from the hotel where, puzzling his hospitable colleagues, he had hidden himself, it was as a great, a very great administrator, who had saved the Bagai from despair and his country from a hateful punitive expedition, that the governor greeted him.

Lee-Armour accepted the archdeacon's presence with á tense, charming smile that made the other's heart check with pity for him. It was a smile which acknowledged the governor's limitations and welcomed the intruder not as a mere necessary evil but as an obvious first choice. After that he gave his undivided attention to his superior.

Mark Lee-Armour was very much the standard colonial official—sandy, wiry, soldierly, his clean-shaven face burned Arab-brown—but the eyes, in a sense, were shifty. They were responsible; they met the governor's own without effort; and, when they looked, they looked straight into the soul; but they would wander off, proudly and impassively, like the eyes of an animal. This uncertainty of glance, giving an impression that there were far more important realities than the present interview, disturbed the archdeacon until he remembered that this was the bored, leonine look of the Bagai warriors themselves.

"Do you feel up to all this tonight, Mark?" the governor asked.

"Yes, sir—if you don't expect me to make much of a speech. I've lost the habit."

"Just tell us stories about the Bagai," suggested the governor.

For ten minutes they talked the shop of their devoted trade, occasionally throwing a courteous ball to the archdeacon. Then the governor, his hollow cheeks flushing as they had hardly done since he was at school, came awkwardly to the point.

"Mark, when you handed over, were your accounts in order? Balance, you know, and all that? Your successor has dropped me a note—"

"He is quite right," Lee-Armour interrupted.

"But—but didn't you give him any explanation?"

"None. I have none."

"But what did you spend it on?"

"I'd rather not say, sir, if you don't mind."

And again the glance flickered off.

"But you—you, Mark! Look here, you know you're booked for a high commissionership?"

"I heard it," he answered without much interest. "They would take me away for something like that."

The governor was justifiably annoyed. If ambition were slighted, what was the incentive for a career? Remembering the archdeacon's presence, he pulled himself up. Did men like Lee-Armour—or himself in his first beloved district—ever have to think of promotion in order to give their best?

"Can you repay the money? Here and now, before the matter goes any further?"

"No, sir."

"But, man, you must have saved something in the last eight years!"

"Nothing. The funds were never quite enough for what I wanted to do. You know."

The governor did. There were always expenses that seemed essential to the man on the spot, and yet could never be justified to any government auditor. A district could be a costly mistress to its lover.

"Wire home for it. I'll risk doing nothing for a couple of days. There must be some way of raising the money."

"No, sir. No rich relatives," Lee-Armour replied, with a shade of irony. "Believe me, I've tried everything already."

"Then you realize there will have to be an inquiry?"

"I realize to the full that there is a criminal charge hanging over me."

It was with the coldest inhumanity towards himself that Lee-Armour pronounced the words—words that the governor had tried hard to keep in the back of his mind, lest he, too, should pronounce them. And the man's self-discipline was so absolute that his voice was not even bitter.

"Mark," begged the governor, shocked into complete unself-consciousness, "there must be a receipt of some sort. There must be some perfectly honourable explanation. I know you spent that twelve hundred quid on your blasted Bagai."

"In a way, sir, yes."

"Then why on earth don't you remember I want to help, and tell me what it was for?"

"Because it would be your duty to take it away from the person I gave it to," Lee-Armour replied, with the directness of a man

who, through weeks of agony, had decided how that very question should be answered. " And that I cannot allow."

" Bribery ? " asked the governor sharply.

It was not unknown for a weak district commissioner to pay out money to possible trouble makers for the preservation of his own peace rather than the country's.

" No, sir. Payment for value received. Received, pressed down and running over."

Through the half-opened blinds of the long north windows, governor and archdeacon watched Lee-Armour walk back across the courtyard to the gates, take the salute of the guard and vanish into the jet-black shadows of the avenue.

Archdeacon Toby, remembering the straightforward accounts of the diocese and his own incompetent arithmetic, said—for the silence had to be broken—that considering all the money which had passed through Lee-Armour's hands for seeds and tools, granaries, lorries and roads, it was a marvel to him that twelve hundred pounds could be traced at all.

" You can trace twopence," the governor snapped.

And so you could. Yet the system was so cumbrous that he had sometimes come up against accounts that wouldn't balance—especially the accounts of queer, devoted fish like Lee-Armour, who, with one half of his mind, must be thinking in terms of cattle and tribal custom. The eyes tortured by sun glare, the obsessions, the strain not only of doing justice day by day but of explaining why it was justice—all those could so unbalance a man that he would scream at the inhuman rulings of a ledger.

" We're all worked out beyond sanity," the governor cried. " Do you realize what we're doing ? Do you realize ? It isn't any longer to make the black man white. It's to give him a culture that in two generations shall be more satisfying than our own. And we have all got quite ordinary brains ! We aren't gods !."

" There are other auditors who know it," said the archdeacon.

" Oh, yes, damn 'em ! " answered the governor, missing the overpious comfort in his agitation. " Some of them can be helpful when they like."

And he reminded the archdeacon of a case like Lee-Armour's where the grim accountants had immediately broken down in smiles at the simplicity of the book-keeping mistake which had wrecked for months the peace of mind of a first-rate man who imagined he had spent the money when he hadn't.

The archdeacon did not say what he thought. It was Lee-Armour's pride which bothered him, his awareness that he was wrecking his career for the sake of the Bagai. There had been no

book-keeping mistake. Lee-Armour was a man to take routine accounting in his stride. And even if there had been a mistake, his successor, coming straight from leave, with a fresh mind, would have spotted it. However, there was no point in depriving the governor of the grain of comfort he had found for himself.

"I'm sure that for tonight, at any rate," said Archdeacon Toby, "we should assume this is a case where the accountants would only smile."

The farewell dinner was in the hotel garden. Darkness was hot as day, but an illusion of coolness, satisfying as coolness itself, was created by the splashing of a fountain, the smell of wet earth and night-flowering shrubs, the ice in the wine buckets, the white uniforms of servants, and of the guests who numbered themselves among Lee-Armour's friends. They should more truly have been called acquaintances. His intimate friends were scattered among the provinces that bordered the Bagai country—one of them to perhaps every fifty thousand square miles.

For Lee-Armour's sake the archdeacon was glad; it would be easier for him to keep up pretences in the presence of people who were either attaching themselves to his legend or eagerly following the star that was inevitably going to rise to the zenith of the Colonial Office.

Archdeacon Toby, in the intervals of talking archidiaconally to the ardent churchwomen placed to right and left of him, watched the group at the head of the horseshoe table. Lee-Armour, sitting between the governor and his wife, was impassive, playing with perfect good manners the easy part of strong, silent man. The governor, too, seemed to be acting without effort. Such a party was of course routine for him, once it had begun, once he had fairly accustomed himself to entertaining and praising the man whom, the very next day, he must order to remain in the colony while his accounts were investigated. He had presided over so much false and real geniality that, when he rose to speak, the right words came to him. Indeed, it was the warmest little after-dinner speech that Archdeacon Toby had ever heard the governor deliver—the result, no doubt, of a deliberate effort not to be cold. In a social crisis, thought the archdeacon, world, flesh and devil certainly had their uses.

Mark Lee-Armour rose to reply. Platitudes, interesting platitudes—what a governor he would make!—until suddenly a moving sincerity quickened his voice. The archdeacon knew that he was listening to his swan song, to words that Lee-Armour intended to be remembered after the truth had come out.

"Honour; that, I think, is the common bond. It doesn't matter how primitive a people are; they still have some conception

of honour. I remember—you all have these memories—one of my Bagai warriors. He killed an Arab trader. I gave him five years. That's the death sentence, of course; they don't last in prison more than one. He took it like a man. You see, to his way of thinking he had done the honourable thing. He told me so. 'And this sentence,' I answered, 'is for the honour of my ruler. 'Then, my lord,' he said in that casual tone of an eighteenth-century aristocrat which they can put on so naturally, 'we both suffer for the welfare of my people, for both are ants crushed between the Bagai and your ruler.' "

Lee-Armour sat down amid an uproarious rattle of applause. Nobody except archdeacon and governor perceived any special point in the story, but it was enough that Lee-Armour had told it and that the party was going well.

The women had seen to it that there was dancing after the dinner. Groups splitting up between the hotel bar, the dance floor and the gardens allowed Archdeacon Toby to withdraw unnoticed. He had no intention of going home, for he knew very well where his duty lay, and hoped that Providence would give him an opportunity to perform it.

Lurking in the shadows—meditating, he preferred to call it—he kept a careful eye upon the garden bar where Lee-Armour drifted along the edge of a little crowd, avoiding confinement in its centre. He was certain that the man longed to be alone, and that his mood would now be of deep melancholy brought on by the moderate drinking which, as guest of honour, he hadn't been able to evade. Lee-Armour would not endure much longer the bitter irony of his farewell dinner; on the other hand, he would not yet retire—since that would be churlish—to his hotel bedroom.

Archdeacon Toby told himself that he had no intention of thrusting his society upon private loneliness, nor—certainly not!—of spying upon it. Yet, when he saw Lee-Armour slip away from the bar and vanish into the cultivated jungle of tropical shrubs which bordered the garden, he followed. Beyond the garden, on the edge of the river flats, the shadow of Lee-Armour moved among the moon shadows of a line of silent palms which striped the sand. And then indeed was Archdeacon Toby guilty of all that hypocrisy with which the missionaries reproached him. With his hands behind his back and an air of pious abstraction, he, too, began to pace among the palms.

He had already passed the lonely figure and wished it good night when he pretended to recognize who it was.

" I am so very sorry about this morning," he said. " I shouldn't have been there."

"I was glad it was you," Lee-Armour answered frankly. "I suppose H. E. had to have somebody, and it was decent of him not to call in anyone official as yet."

"He's inclined to think now that you made a mistake in the accounts," said the archdeacon.

Lee-Armour's low voice was angry, in the exasperation of a man who was never afraid to face facts with the proneness of his opposite type to self deception.

"Good Lord, didn't I make it clear? Didn't I make it clear that I never did anything more deliberate in my life?"

"You made it crystal-clear."

"Good Lord, it was a deliberate payment when I knew that I was going! The best I could do for my people—for both my peoples. The Bagai must not despair. I won't have police and shooting after I've gone."

"I don't want to intrude," said the archdeacon, "but if it would do you any good to tell a neutral—"

"It would do me good. In all this nonsense"—he waved a hand towards the distant lights and the unfamiliar beat of drums in a sentimental waltz—"I'm wondering if I'm mad, if I have or haven't gone native. Do you people still observe the seal of the confessional?"

"Doubtfully," answered the archdeacon, "like so much. Perhaps it would be more honest if at this hour and place I offered you my word of honour."

"Look here—I gave that money to a witch doctor. I don't know what he serves. I doubt if he knows himself. But it is not our God."

"There is no other," Archdeacon Toby replied. "The First Commandment is, for our days, rather oddly worded. 'Thou shalt have no other gods' should be, 'There are no other gods.' What did you want God to do for the witch doctor?"

"To make the rain fall when it was needed. To prevent the rain falling when it was not."

"Twelve hundred pounds seems a lot," the archdeacon heard himself saying, as he tried to order his thoughts into an act of divine worship and human understanding.

"No. The bargain was for as long as he should live. He was to do nothing else. And he has expenses, and no cattle like the rest of them."

"He can do it?"

"He always has in the past. Look at the statistics."

"That was what they called beginner's luck?"

"Yes. Luck. A little tilting of the balances. I don't know how they do it. But it's no good telling me—or most of us out here—that they can't."

"If I told you that they couldn't, I should be unworthy of priesthood," the archdeacon answered gently, knowing himself to be on the solid ground of theology.

"They have powers we have not got?"

"We have all the powers that they have. But to use them, that demands, I fear, a simplicity which only our saints can attain."

To him, as a deeply read churchman, every religion—of the past or of the primitive present—had its value in so far as it foreshadowed the mysteries of the faith. He believed with all his heart that those truths which man had feebly tried to utter through myth and magic were finally formulated by God in Christianity. Thus the prayers of the church for rain and for delivery from storm and tempest were the divinely established ritual, but not the only possible ritual.

"I thought you would be the last person to approve," said Lee-Armour wonderingly.

"I did not say I approved," the archdeacon replied. "Only that I believed. Dear son, I have been in Africa long enough to know that sometimes, very rarely, men are given control over rain and over animals. I myself am so made that I have never doubted God shut the mouths of the lions for Daniel in the den. Nevertheless, one's faith is firmer when one has seen—as I have seen—the tribal priest shut the mouths of the crocodiles at the bathing pool."

"Yes," said Lee-Armour, "I've heard of that. It's quite safe to swim when he has given the word."

"I found it so."

"Then you at least will understand that I am paying a small price for my Bagai."

"The price was twelve hundred pounds," Archdeacon Toby answered, smiling. "Not a big cheque for me to draw, I think, for rain and peace. And for my own peace too. Shall we go back to the hotel? I want to tell the governor that there has been a mistake, a very subtle mistake, and that the money has now been debited to the right account."

* * *

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

On Easter Sunday one of the farmer's small sons filled a chicken coop with eggs dyed every colour of the rainbow. The rooster took one look at the dazzling display, ran straight out to the yard, and killed the peacock.

MARIAGE A LA MODE

Choose not alone a proper mate,
But proper time to marry

WILLIAM COWPER

The women of Afghanistan go about unveiled, and a young man may choose a partner for himself without the aid of a match-maker, or even of his parents. If some girl takes his fancy, all he has to do is to cut off a lock of her hair or throw a sheet over her, and proclaim the damsel his bride.

REV. H. N. HUTCHINSON, *Marriage Customs in Many Lands*

Bride's Adorning

Last night the red candles were snuffed out in the bridal chamber,
Tomorrow the bride will pay her respects to her in-laws in the Ancestral Hall ;
Her toilet completed, she asks her husband in a low voice
Whether her eyebrows are painted in a fashionable style.

CHU CH'ING-YÜ, *translated by* SOAME JENYNS

Tiger

Tiger didn't know anything about the wedding until his father told him. He didn't even know the girl. But he bowed to his parents' wishes. He was only sixteen years old, and was not in the habit of attending Indian ceremonies in the village. But he knew . . . that after the ceremony friends and relatives would bring him gifts until he began to eat, only then would they stop the offerings.

Every night and every morning for a week close relatives came and rubbed him down to prepare his body for married life. On the morning of the wedding he bathed. They dressed him in the wedding gown and put a crown on his head. His father said: "Boy, dese people not so rich, so don't stayam too long to eat."

At the back of the bride's house a great tent of bamboo and coconut branches had been erected. Five goats and six sheep had been slaughtered, an extravagance which could only be afforded at a time like this.

Tiger looked at everybody and everything with a tight feeling in his throat. He wished he knew more about what was going to happen to him.

As part of the ceremony he had to rub a red powder through the path in the middle of her head when a white sheet was thrown over them. As he did this he lifted the veil and looked at her face. She had black, sad eyes, long hair, undeveloped breasts.

"What you name?" he asked breathlessly.

"Urmilla," she whispered timidly.

Tiger didn't think that he would have to look at that face for the rest of his life. He wondered if she could cook, but he didn't ask himself if she knew anything about what boys and girls did when they got married, because he didn't know either. He was aware of a painful exhilaration; painful because neither of them understood, exhilarating because it was something different in his monotonous life.

They offered him a cow and a hut in Barataria and two hundred dollars in cash, besides smaller things. He didn't know what to expect, or whether he should wait for more gifts before beginning the feast. And then on a sudden impulse—perhaps it was fear, uncertainty—he took up a piece of *meetai* and bit it. That ended the offerings.

Afterwards his father caught him alone . . . and hissed: "Yuh fool! Could have gettam plenty more thing! Yuh eatam too quick, stupid boy!"

But it didn't matter to Tiger. Vaguely, like morning mist, he found himself wondering what life was going to be like.

SAMUEL SELVON, *A Brighter Sun*

The Bride Was A Red Girl

I saw the marriage of the trapper in the open air in the far west, the bride was a red girl,
Her father and his friends sat near cross-legged and dumbly smoking, they had moccasins to their feet and large thick blankets hanging from their shoulders,
On a bank lounged the trapper, he was drest mostly in skins, his luxuriant beard and curls protected his neck, he held his bride by the hand,
She had long eyelashes, her head was bare, her coarse straight locks descended upon her voluptuous limbs and reach'd to her feet.

WALT WHITMAN, *Song of Myself*

A Time For Revelrie

This yeir, in the moneth of Julii, Mr John Davidson, ane of our Regentis, maid a play at the mariage of Mr John Colvin, quhilk I saw playit in Mr Knox presence: quhairin, according to Mr Knox doctrine, the castell of Edinburgh wes besiegit, takin, and the Captain, with ane or two with him, hangit in effigie.

JAMES MELVILLE, *Diary*, 1571

Nuptials For A Goddess

I thought I would settle once and for all with Lola the question of who she liked best . . . Of course, she said, she loved us both as much as a woman could especially as we both had risked our lives for her . . . I then explained to her that she could choose without choosing. And showed her a sovereign. I then invited her to toss the coin and after a while she managed it quite nicely. I then told her that this was quite fair and asked her if she was willing to toss for myself and Peru and of course she would be the wife of whoever won for ever. She smiled and said if you two men are willing so am I. I led her to the camp fire and told all hands to form a ring . . .

The best eider down covers were brought the lantorns were all lit and the fires replenished making the old grove look more home-like. Take off your hat and lay it down brother and shake. We shook hands on the deal. I levelled out the sand and handed the gold piece to the smiling Goddess of high degree. Your shout, I cried to Peru are you ready.

Amongst the murmuring and now excited circle of men she tossed up the piece and strange to say it fell in the sand plum up as it could possibly be. No toss, I cried . . . I levelled the ground off and this time padded it well down. She held the coin ready. Your shout said Peru. I called Tales. This time she made a beautiful spin it fell Heads Up. Great cheers wrent the air and re-echoed . . .

I now shook hands with my best mate on earth and complimented him on his luck. I ordered the best we had to be brought from the locker and we drank bumpers one after another to the success of the happy pair.

Music was now king. Lola sang whilst the ngombi and harp rang out to the voices of the happiest crowd on earth. We kept going all night and the sun was high when we awoke. We now had a good hearty meal and took our usual swim whilst Perus lady took her usual dive higher up the beach with several of the Ncombi women who had come in to enjoy the fun. We all dressed our best to celebrate this memorable occasion.

ALFRED ALOYSIUS HORN, *Trader Horn*

Sing Io, Hymen

He levels faire that by his side
Laies at night his lovely Bride.
Sing Io : Hymen, Io : Io : Hymen.

THOMAS CAMPION

★*A born traveller takes the rough with the smooth and even enjoys the hazards of the road—at least in retrospect. The Easter pilgrimage to the Jordan early in the seventeenth century was an adventure as well as a conducted tour, and the writer of this zestful report obviously enjoyed every minute of it. He was a Scot who spent most of his life travelling through Europe and the Near East, "overmastered with the greedy desire of more sights."*

PILGRIM'S TREASURE

by WILLIAM LITHGOW

MONDAY earely, we Pilgrimes went foorth to view the monuments within the Citty, being accompanied with the Padre Viccario, and a French Predicatore.

As we were spending that day in these sights, the Guardian had prepared one hundred souldiers, sixty horse-men, and forty foot-men, to take with him the day following, for his conduction to Jordan, and the mountaine in the Wildernesse where Christ fasted; which is his usuall custome once every yeare betweene Palme-sunday and Easter, returning againe before Good-friday.

These places cannot be viewed, save onely at that tīme; neither may a Pilgrime goe along with the souldiers, unlesse he give the value of seven Crownes or Piasters (as a propyne) unto the Lieutenant, being forty two shillings starling: and if the Traveller will not goe to that charge, he may stay there till their returne, which I would not wish him to doe, if possibly he may spare the money, for the sight of Sodome, and Jordans sake.

That same night after supper, the Guardian demanded of us Travellers, if we would goe with him to see these memorable, and singular things, upon the former condition: To whom we answered in a generall consent, we would, and so payed our moneyes.

Earely upon Tuesday morning all the Friers and Pilgrimes being mounted on Mules save onely pedestriall I, and two Mules laden with our provision of victuals; we departed from the City about nine of the clocke in the forenoone, keeping our faces South-east, and leaving Bethphage and Bethany on our left hand, wee had pleasant travelling for seven miles; but in the afternoone wee

entred in a barren and desart Countrey till Sun-setting: where at last wee arrived at a standing Well, and there refreshing our selves and the beasts, wee reposed till two houres within night.

After that the Captaine had cried March Away, we set forward, being well guarded round about with our keepers, because we entred into a dangerous way, and a most desolate and fabulous soile.

In all this deformed Countrey, wee saw neyther house, nor Village, for it is altogether desartuous and inhabited onely by wilde Beasts and naked Arabians. Before wee came neere to Sodom and Gomorrah, by seven miles, we, I say, encountred with such deep sandy ground, that the Mules were not able to carry our Company through: Whereupon they all dismounted, wrestling, and wading above the middle part of their bodies, and sometimes falling in over their heads, they were in great danger of perishing, although the robustnesse of my body carried mee through on my feete, relieving also divers times some of these Friers and Pilgrimes, that were almost choaked and over-whelmed with Sand, but not for lacke of Wine.

Even in the middest of this turmoyling paine, (the night being darke) the unwelcomed Arabs environed and invaded us with a storme of Arrowes, which they sent from the tops of little hard hils, whereupon they stood, for knowing the advantage of the ground: they tooke opportunity to give the more feareful assaults: yet they prevailed nothing (although they wounded some of our Souldiers) such was the resolute Courage of our valourous Defendants.

True it is, that in all my travels I was never so sore fatigated, nor more fearefully indangered, as I was that night.

A little after midnight, these Savages leaving us, and wee leaving our troublesome way, we accoasted the Lake of Sodom, and marched along the marine shore above nine miles before we came to Jordan. Approaching to the banke-side, we dismounted, and uncloathed our selves, going in naked to the River, and washed us to refresh our bodies; our Souldiers lying a little off from us, as pledges of our lives, and their owne safeguards, stayed as Bulwarks for our protection.

The water of Jordan hath beene transported to Venice in barrels, for that purity it hath; which will reserve unspoiled, both moneths and yeares, and the longer it is kept, it is the more fresher; and to drinke it, is an excellent remedy for the fever quartan or quotidian, being neare in vertue to the Wine of Lebanon.

Considering the auncient reputation of this famous river, and

the rare sight of such an unfrequented place, I climbed up to the top of a Turpentine tree, which grew within the limited flood, a little above where I left my company even naked, as I came from swimming, and cut downe a faire hunting rod of the heavy and sad Turpentine tree, being three yards long, wondrous straight, full of small knots, and of a yellowish colour; which afterward, with great paines, I brought to England, and did present it (as the rarest gemme of a Pilgrimes treasure) to his Majesty.

But I remember in the choosing thereof an unexpected accident fell out: For I being sequestrat from the sight of the company, upon this solitary tree, with broad obscuring leaves, the Friers and Souldiers removed; keeping their course towards Jericho: but within two furlongs from Jordan, they were beset with the former Nocturnall enemies, who assailed them with a hard conflict: For I hearing the Harquebuse go off, was straight in admiration, and looking downe to the place where I left my associates, they were gone.

So bending my eyes a little further in the Plaine, I saw them at a martiall combat: which sight gave me suddenly, the threatning of despaire: not knowing whether to stay intrenched, within the circundating leaves, to approve the events of my auspicious fortunes: Or in prosecuting a reliefe, to be participant of their doubtfull deliverance.

In the end pondering, I could hardly or never escape their hands, either there, or by the way going up to Jerusalem, leapt downe from the tree, leaving my Turkish cloathes lying upon the ground, tooke onely in my hand the rod and sash which I wore on my head; and ranne starke naked above a quarter of a mile amongst thistles, and sharpe pointed grass, which pittifully pricked the soles of my feete, but the feare of death for the present, expel'd the griefe of that unlooked for paine.

Approaching on the safe side of my company, one of our Souldiers broke forth on horsebacke, being determined to kill mee for my staying behinde: Yea, and three times stroke at me with his halfe-pike; but his horse being at his speed, I prevented his cruelty, first by falling downe, next by running in amongst the thickest of the Pilgrimes, recovering the Guardian's face, which when the Guardian espied and saw my naked body, hee presently pulled off his gray gowne, and threw it to me, whereby I might hide the secrets of nature.

By which meanes, (in the space of an houre) I was cloathed three manner of wayes: First, like a Turke: Secondly, like a wild Arabian: And thirdly, like a grey Frier, which was a barbarous, a savage and a religious habit.

The Captaine at last entering in parley with the Arabs, by some contributing promises did mitigate their fury, for their compounded acknowledgement was to be sent them from Jerusalem: Whereupon, wee marching toward Jericho, reposed our selves under a cooling shade, and dined there on the Wine and provision carryed with us.

* * *

THE WEAKER SEX

"AFTER all," as a pretty girl once said to me, "women are a sex by themselves, so to speak." SIR MAX BEERBOHM

The man who asks a woman what she wants deserves all that's coming to him. ALEC WAUGH

All sensible men are of the same opinion about women and no sensible man ever says what that opinion is. SAMUEL BUTLER

Females generally fall into two categories, good and bad—the good being so because they can't get the necessary masculine co-operation to be bad.

JACK LAIT and LEE MORTIMER, *Washington Confidential*

The woman of the house (any woman—and any house) may say without raising her eyes from the heel she is turning: "I was thinking that maybe we should get new curtains for the sitting-room windows."

The statement is qualified, but it admits of no qualification. The manner of it is that she wants the man of the house to drive a foolish notion out of her head; but the meaning is that an edict has been issued. It seems like the past tense, but it is really the imperative mood. The lady speaks so quietly that you might think that she was addressing the heel of the sock. But she is addressing the heel that wears the sock; and he knows it.

JOHN D. SHERIDAN

The history of women is the history of the worst form of tyranny the world has ever known. The tyranny of the weak over the strong. It is the only tyranny that lasts. OSCAR WILDE

INVISIBLE BOY

"You'll be mighty lonesome, people lookin' through you like a telescope," said Old Lady

by RAY BRADBURY

OLD LADY beat the dead frog into a powder with a long iron spoon, talking to it quickly and every now and then shifting her beady, grey bird eyes to the cabin. Each time she looked, a head in the small, thin window ducked as if she'd thrown a stone.

"Charlie," cried Old Lady, "you come outa there! I'm fixing a magic to unlock that door; you come out now and I won't use it!"

The only sound was the warm mountain sun on the high green pine trees, a squirrel going around and around on a trunk, the ants moving in a fine brown line at Old Lady's bare, blue-veined feet.

"You been in there two days, darn you!" she panted, ringing the spoon against a flat rock, causing the plump grey miracle bag at her waist to swing. Sweating, she rose and marched at the cabin. "Come out, now!" She flicked a pinch of powder inside the lock. "All right, I'll come get you!" she wheezed.

She spun the knob with one spindly-fingered fist, first one way, then the other.

"Fling this door wide, oh Lord!" she intoned.

When nothing flung, she added yet another pinch and waited. Her long blue untidy skirt rustled as she peered into her bag of wonders to see if she had any other charms there, like the frog which she'd killed months ago for such a crisis as this.

She heard Charlie breathing against the door. His folks had gone off into some Ozark town early this week, leaving him, and he'd run almost six miles to Old Lady for company—she was by way of being an aunt or cousin or some such, and he didn't mind her fashions.

But then, two days ago, Old Lady, having got used to the boy around, decided to keep him for convenient company. She pricked her thin shoulder bone, drew out three blood pearls, spat wet over her right elbow, trampled on a cricket and at the same instant clawed her left hand at Charlie, crying, "My son you are, you are my son, for all eternity!"

Charlie, bounding like a startled hare, had crashed off into the bush, heading home.

But Old Lady, skittering quick as a gingham lizard, cornered him

in a dead end and Charlie hid himself away in this old hermit's cabin and wouldn't come out, no matter how she banged door, window or knothole with amber-coloured fist or trounced her ritual fires, explaining to him that he was certainly her son now, all right.

" Charlie, you there ? " she asked, cutting holes in the door planks with her bright little slippery eyes.

" I'm all of me here," he replied finally, very tired.

Maybe he would fall out on the ground any moment. She wrestled with the knob hopefully. Perhaps a pinch too much frog powder had grated the lock wrong ? She always overdid or underdid her miracles, she mused angrily, never doing them just exact, Devil take it !

" Charlie, I only wants someone to night-prattle to, someone to warm hands with at the fire. Someone to fetch kindling for me mornings, and fight off the blues that come creeping of early fogs ! I ain't got no fetchings on you for yourself, son, just for your company ! " She smacked her lips. " Tell you what, Charles, you come out and I'll *teach* you things ! "

" What things ? " he countered suspiciously.

" Teach you how to buy cheap, sell high. Catch a snow weasel, cut off its head, carry it warm in your hind pocket. There."

" Aw," said Charlie.

She made haste. " Teach you to make yourself shot-proof. So if anyone bangs at you with a gun, nothing happens."

When Charlie stayed silent, she gave him the secret in a high fluttering whisper. " Dig and stitch mouse-ear roots on Friday during full moon, and wear 'em around your neck in white silk."

" You're crazy," Charlie said.

" Teach you how to stop blood or make animals stand frozen or make blind horses see, all them things I'll teach you ! Teach you to cure a swelled-up cow and unbewitch a goat. Show you how to make yourself invisible ! "

" Oh," said Charlie.

Old Lady's heart beat like a salvation tambourine. The knob turned from the other side.

" You," said Charlie, " are funning me."

" No, I'm not," exclaimed Old Lady. " Oh, Charlie, why I'll make you like a window, see right through you. Why, child, you'll be surprised ! "

" Real invisible ? "

" Real invisible ! "

" You won't fetch on to me if I walk out ? "

" Won't touch a bristle of you, son."

" Well," he drawled reluctantly. " All right."

The door opened. Charlie stood in his bare feet, head down, chin against chest. " Make me invisible," he demanded.

" First we got to find us a bat," said Old Lady. " You find one ! "

She watched him climb up a tree. It was certainly nice having him around after so many years alone with nothing to talk to but bird droppings and snail tracks.

Pretty soon a bat with a broken wing came fluttering down out of the tree. Old Lady picked it up beating warm and shrieking between its sharp white teeth, and Charlie dropped down after it, hand upon clenched hand, yelling.

That night, with the moon nibbling at the spiced pine needles, Old Lady extracted a long silver needle from under her wide blue dress. Suppressing her excitement and secret anticipation, she held up the dead bat and held the needle steady-steady.

She had long ago realized that her miracles, despite all effort, failed. She always hoped that one day the miracles might start functioning, which would prove that God had forgiven her for her sinful life as a young lady. So far God had made no comment, but nobody knew this except Old Lady.

" Ready ? " she asked of Charlie, who crouched cross-kneed, wrapping his pretty legs in long goose-pimpled arms, his mouth open, showing his teeth. " I'm ready," he said, shivering.

" There ! " She plunged the needle deep in the bat's right eye. " So ! Like that ! "

" Oh ! " cried Charlie, covering his face.

" Now I wrap it in gingham and here, you put it in your pocket, keep it there, bat and all. Go on."

He pocketed the charm.

" Charlie ! Charlie ! " she shrieked suddenly, in a shrill, fearful voice. " Where are you ? I can't see you, child ! "

" Here ! " He jumped so that the light ran in red streaks up his body, " I'm here, Old Lady ! " He stared wildly at his arms, legs, chest and toes. " I'm here ! "

Her eyes looked as if they watched many butterflies each criss-crossing the others in flight.

" You went *fast !* Quick as a humming-bird ! Come back, Charlie ! "

" But I'm here ! " He looked scared.

" Where ? "

" By the fire. And I can see myself. I'm *not* invisible ! "

Old Lady rocked on her lean flanks, " Course you can see yourself. Every invisible person knows himself, otherwise, how could you eat, walk, or go around places ? Charlie, touch me, so I know you."

Uneasily, he put out a hand.

She pretended to jerk at his touch and cried, " Ah ! " as if startled.

" You mean to say you can't find me ? " he asked. " Truly ? "

" Not the least bit of you ! "

She found a tree to look at and looked at it with eyes shining, careful not to glance at him. " Why, I sure did a trick that time," she sighed with wonder. " Whoo-eee. Quickest invisible I ever did. How d'you feel, Charlie ? "

" Like Creek water all stirred."

" You'll settle."

Then she added, after a pause, " Well, what you going to do now, Charlie, since you're invisible ? "

All sorts of things shot through his brain; she could tell. Adventures stood up and danced like hell-fire in his eyes, and his mouth, just hanging, told what it meant to be a boy who imagined himself like the mountain winds.

In a cold dream he said, " I'll run across wheat fields, climb snow mountains, steal white chickens off'n farms. I'll kick pink pigs when they ain't looking. I'll pinch pretty girls' legs when they sleep, snap their garters in schoolrooms." Charlie looked at Old Lady, and from the shiny tips of her eyes, she saw something wicked shape his face. " And other things I'll do, I'll do, I will," he said.

" Don't try nothing on me," warned Old Lady. " I'm brittle as spring ice and I don't take handling." Then : " What about your folks ? "

" My folks ? "

" You can't go home looking like that. Scare the inside ribbons out of them. Your mother'd faint straight back like timber falling. Think they want you about the house to stumble over and your Ma have to call you every three minutes, even though you're in the room next her elbow ? "

Charlie had not considered that. He sort of simmered down and whispered out a little " Gosh," and felt his long bones carefully.

" You'll be mighty lonesome. People looking through you like a telescope, people knocking you aside because they didn't reckon you to be under-foot. And women, Charlie, women—"

He swallowed. " What about women ? "

" No woman will be giving you a second stare. And no woman wants to be kissed by a boy's mouth they can't even find."

Charlie dug his bare foot in the soil, contemplatively. He pouted. " I'll stay invisible, anyway, a little while. I'll have a little fun. I'll be careful, that's all. Stay out from in front of waggons and horses and Pa. Pa shoots at the least sound." Charlie blinked. " Some day Pa'd fill me full of shot, thinkin' I was a squirrel in the yard. Oh."

She nodded at a tree. " That's likely."

" Well," he decided, " I'll be invisible for tonight and you can fix me back whole again tomorrow, Old Lady."

" If that ain't just like a boy, always wanting to be what he can't be," remarked Old Lady to a beetle on a log.

" What do you mean ? " asked Charlie.

" Well, it was hard work," explained she, " fixing you up. It'll take a little time for it to wear off. Like a coat of paint wears off, boy."

" You ! " he demanded. " You make me see-able ! You did this ! "

" Hush," she said. " It'll wear off a hand or a foot at a time."

" How'll it look, me around the hills with just one hand showing ? "

" Like a five-winged bird hopping over the stones and brambles."

" Or a foot showing ? "

" Like a small pink rabbit jumping thicket ! "

" Or my head floating ? "

" Like a floating balloon with hair on ! "

" How long before I'm all *whole* ? " he asked.

She deliberated that it might pretty well be a year.

He groaned and sobbed and bit his lips and made fists. " You did this to me. You did this to me. I won't be able to go home."

She winked. " But you can stay here, child, with me, I'll keep you fed well."

He flung it at her. " You did this on purpose ! You mean old hag, you want to keep me here ! "

He ran off into the shrubs in an instant.

" Charlie, come back ! "

No answer but the pattern of his feet on the soft dark turf, and his wet choking, passing swiftly off.

She kindled a fire. " He'll be back," she whispered. And thinking inward on herself, " I'll have company through spring into late summer. Then, when I'm tired of him and want silence, I'll send him home."

Charlie returned noiselessly with the first grey of dawn, gliding over rimed turf to where Old Lady sprawled like a bleached stick before scattered ashes.

He sat on pebbles and stared at her.

She didn't dare look at him or beyond. He had made no sound, so how could she know he was about ? She couldn't.

He sat there, tear marks on his face.

Pretending to be just waking, but she had found no sleep all night, she stood up, grunting, yawning, and said to the dawn :

" Charlie ? "

Her eyes passed from pines to soil, to sky, to hills. She called over and over, and she felt like staring straight at him but she restrained herself. " Oh, Charles ? "

He sat, beginning to grin a bit, suddenly, knowing he was close to her, yet she must feel alone. He felt secret power, security, pleased with his invisibility.

She said, " Where can that boy be ? If he made a noise so I could tell where he is, maybe I'd fix him breakfast."

She prepared breakfast, irritated at his continuous quiet. She fried bacon on a stick. " The smell of it will draw his nose."

While her back was turned, he swiped all the frying bacon and devoured it.

She whirled, crying out, " Lord, Lord ! "

She eyed the clearing, suspiciously. " Charlie, that you ? "

Charlie wiped clean his mouth on his wrists.

She trotted about the clearing, making as if she was trying to locate him and finally, with a clever thought, acting blind, she headed straight for him, groping. " Charlie, where are you ? "

A lightning streak, he evaded her, bobbing, ducking.

It took all her will-power not to give chase ; but you can't chase an invisible boy, so she sat down, pouting, and tried to fry more bacon, but every fresh strip she cut he would steal hot off the fire and run away far. Finally, cheeks burning, she cried, " I know where you are ! Right over there ! I hear you run ! " She pointed to one side of him, not too accurate. He ran some more. " Now, you're there ! " she said. " There and there ! " pointing to all the places he was in the next five minutes. " I hear you snap a twig, press a grass blade. I got fine shell ears, delicate as rose flowers ! "

Silently, he galloped off among the trees, his voice coming back. " Can't hear me when I'm sitting on a rock. I'll just sit ! "

All day he sat on a high rock in the wind, motionless and tongue-tied.

Old Lady gathered wood in the forest, feeling his eyes on her spine. She wanted to babble, " Oh, I see you, I see you ! I was only fooling about invisible boys ! You're right there ! " but she didn't.

The following morning he began springing from behind trees, making horrible faces at her, drawing down his lips with his fingers, popping eyes, pushing up his nose so you could look in and see his brain thinking.

Once she dropped her kindling. She made off as if a blue jay startled her.

He made a motion as if to strangle her. She trembled a little.

He made another motion as if to spit on her cheek.

These motions she bore without a lid-flicker or mouth-twitch.

He stuck out his tongue, making strange noises. He wiggled his ears so she wanted to laugh, and finally she did laugh and explained it by saying, " Sat on a lizard. Whew, how it poked ! "

But at high noon the whole affair reached its terrible climax.

It was then that Charlie raced down the valley stark naked !

Old Lady nearly fell flat with shock. Charlie raced naked up one side of the valley and naked down the other, his feet shimmering in the manner of a humming-bird.

Old Lady's tongue locked her mouth. What could she say ? Charlie, go dress ? For shame ? Stop that ? Could she ? Oh, Charlie, God Almighty ! Could she say that now, *could* she ?

Upon the big rock she witnessed him dancing up and down, naked as the day of birth, stamping bare feet, smacking his hands on stark knees and sucking in and out his white stomach like blowing and deflating a circus balloon.

She shut her eyes tight and prayed.

After three hours of this, she pleaded, " Charlie, Charlie, come here, I got something to tell you ! "

Like a fallen leaf he came ; dressed again, praise the Lord.

" Charlie," she said, looking at the pine trees, " I see your right toe. There it is."

" You do ? " he said.

" Yes," she said, very sadly. " There it is like a horny toad on the grass. And there, up there's your left ear hanging on the air like a pink butterfly."

Charlie danced. " I'm filling in, I'm filling in ! "

Old Lady nodded. " Here comes your ankle ! "

" Gimme both my feet ! " ordered Charlie.

" You got 'em."

" How about my hands ? "

" I see one crawling on your knee like a daddy longlegs."

" How about the other one ? "

" It's crawling, too."

" I got a body ? "

" Shaping up fine."

" I'll need my head to go home, Old Lady."

To go home, she thought wearily. " No ! " she said, stubborn and angry. " No, you ain't got no head. No head, at all." She'd leave that to the very last. " No head, no head," she insisted.

" No head ? " he wailed.

" Yes, oh my God, yes, yes, you got your blamed head ! " she snapped, giving in. " Now, fetch me back my bat with the needle in his eye ! "

He threw it at her. " Haaa-yoooo ! " His yelling went all up the

valley, and long after he had run off towards home, she heard his echoes, racing.

Then she plucked up her kindling with a great dry weariness and started back towards her shack, sighing, talking. And Charlie followed her all the way, *really* invisible now, so she couldn't see him, just hear him, like a cone dropping or a deep underground stream trickling, or a squirrel clambering on a bough ; and over the fire at twilight she and Charlie sat, him invisible, and she fed him bacon he wouldn't take, so she ate it herself, and then she fixed some magic and fell asleep with Charlie, made out of sticks and rags and pebbles, but still warm and her very own son, slumbering and nice in her shaking mother arms . . . and they talked about golden things in drowsy voices until dawn made the fire slowly, slowly wither out . . .

* * *

WANDERLUST

A few weeks more, and most people's thoughts will be turning to the joys of the road. But meantime, while there's still an edge to the wind, why not a little armchair travel with these globe-trotters of literature? Allow one mark for the traveller, one for the source and one for the author, making a possible total of twenty-seven. The answers are on page 98.

1. *A pioneer in aviation, this young man ignored the safety regulations and crashed into the sea which afterwards bore his name.*
2. *And so, said this dealer in gruesome souvenirs, the aged traveller was doomed to wander on, praying his Mother Earth to let him in.*
3. *To prove a point, this modern Viking—whose favourite dish was pineapple—crossed an ocean on a raft.*
4. *With her Royal lover she sailed to Sicily from a country without a coast!*
5. *To avoid an old and ugly bride he took to a musical career on the road—and met a charming schoolgirl.*
6. *The capture of a general in his own house was one of the many exploits of this modern wanderer through forbidden lands.*
7. *A farmhouse could be* too *neat, noted this highly critical observer, as he rode through the English countryside.*
8. *Giants and monsters were easy prey to this wayfarer who befriended a woman and her children on an allegorical journey.*
9. *The bold professor led the way—against pterodactyls and other terrifying beasts, in that strange forgotten world.*

★*Gustavus of Sweden, preparing his fleet for a great offensive against the threatening forces of Catherine of Russia, does well to enlist the services of Captain Sidney Smith. For to this young but seasoned captain, accustomed to battling against the red tape of his Admiralty, the command of a mere combined land and sea expedition is a simple proposition!*

KNIGHT OF SWEDEN

by SHOWELL STYLES

THE *Journals* of Count Christian Lundeberg (the brown pages are in the Nordiska Museum) do not even mention the Fall of the Bastille. The Secretary for Naval Affairs to Gustavus III of Sweden no doubt considered his royal master's preparations for the unequal struggle against Russia far more important. The arrogant encroachments of the Empress Catherine obscured, for him, the significance of the events in France.

"H.E. the French Ambassador," writes the Count in his angular hand in January 1790, "much perturbed by news that his King now wears a tricolour cockade and proclaims himself no better than the least of his subjects. I assured him this could be no more than an ill-advised masquerade. A King who is not a leader is not a King. God be thanked, we have a King in Sweden who will lead us into battle against oppression. The fleet to oppose Russia is nearing completion, thanks to the energy and excellent advice of Colonel Sidney Smith, who has been with the King in Stockholm these last six weeks. I am today instructed to present him with a high command in the fleet, which command must of course be ratified by His Majesty of England, since Colonel Smith is in King George's service."

Colonel Smith—the rank was accorded him as the Swedish equivalent of his British naval rank—received the letter at a certain house in the Bergsgatan of Stockholm, the home of one of the Queen of Sweden's ladies-in-waiting, the Lady Ingrid Hellner.

Ingrid Hellner, if her portrait does not lie, was of an almost ethereal beauty. Small, slim, with a skin of pale gold and hair scarcely darker, she was like some northern fairy of flame and snow. The hawk-faced captain from England had intrigued her from his first appearance at Court. She told him, with much frankness, that she was lonely and unhappy at Court, because of the shameful treat-

ment meted out to her by her erstwhile betrothed, Count Dona, a nobleman of Sundsvall in the north. With a pretty confusion she hinted that she had allowed him to become her lover and that he had then abandoned her, to live a life of vicious orgy in his northern castle.

Any of the Queen's ladies could have told Captain Smith a different version of this story. But they did not, for she had a tongue like a dagger. And the captain, his indignation stirred on her behalf and his conscience eased, yielded to the undoubted attractions of this lovely lady.

The Lady Ingrid, among her other arts, counted the art of listening. Smith, brimming with enthusiasm for his work of overseeing the preparation of a great fleet for war, needed listeners. That he had no other friends at Court was natural enough. Confidant of the King, friend of the King's brother, he might be; but he was also an alien brought in over their heads to advise their sovereign. So they were as polite as courtesy dictated and as distant as courtesy allowed.

Captain Smith was well aware of this coldness, but it did not worry him. He was too intent upon his plans to be perturbed by unfriendliness. On the other hand, he felt the need of some intelligent person to whom he could pour out his hopes and schemes. The Lady Ingrid knew nothing about ships of war, but she was intelligent as well as incurably amorous.

A footman tapped discreetly on the door of Lady Ingrid's white-and-gold parlour. Captain Smith himself, a brocaded dressing-gown over his breeches and shirt, opened the door and took the packet bearing the royal seal. He read the superscription and turned to the girl who sat in a low chair before the great fire of pine logs.

"From His Majesty," he said. "You will pardon me, *chérie*?"

Ingrid nodded, smiling at him. She was in a loose gown of peach-coloured velvet, and her long hair was unpowdered and unbound, so that the changing light turned it to a living glory of pale gold.

Captain Smith paced quickly across the room and back, letter in hand.

He halted and swung round to face Ingrid. "Forgive me, *chérie*. The King offers me a command, and I must to England to obtain my own King's permission to accept it. I shall leave tomorrow, since the roads are open—"

"Tomorrow!" Ingrid sat upright, her small white hands clutching the arms of her chair. "You cannot, you must not!"

She covered her face with her hands and began to sob.

"*Cœur de mon cœur!*" Captain Smith leapt to comfort her. "I shall not rest until I'm here with you again, I swear it! The days will be years—"

But though she used all the arts of which she was mistress, she could not turn him from his purpose. He left the house in Bergsgatan within the hour and on the next morning was over the bridges and driving southward before the sun was up.

Captain Smith bucketed over snow-bound roads, pitched and tossed through grey winter seas, and came to London after a journey of fourteen days. That he came there so soon was due to Liston, the British Ambassador, who required him to carry important dispatches to England and to that end chartered a special brig. These dispatches were, in fact, an appeal from Gustavus to the British Government for naval aid in the forthcoming struggle against Russia. With these to present to the Cabinet and his own letter from Gustavus, Captain Smith had some excuse for deeming his errand an important one.

Having given his dispatches from his own hand into that of the Duke of Leeds (as representing His Majesty's Cabinet) and yielded his application for permission to serve Sweden, together with Gustavus's letter, into the slow-grinding mills of Admiralty, he went to Dover to see his mother.

In a fortnight he was back in London pestering secretaries and supercilious clerks for news. A month later he was still at it. Nor did a personal interview with the Duke advance his case. He was told with ducal bluntness that he took too much upon himself.

He waited, writing unavailing letters and pestering unhelpful officials, until the middle of April; and then, seeing at last that his cause was lost, sent a message to the King of Sweden. He could not, he wrote, accept the command offered by Gustavus, since he had received not even tacit permission to do so; but he begged to be allowed to follow the Swedish standard.

The reply came swiftly, bidding him to come with all speed. And in the mid-week of May, having narrowly escaped drowning in the Kattegat, he landed at Karlskrona.

News awaited him at Karlskrona. The Swedish fleet, commanded by Gustavus in person, with his brother Charles as second-in-command, had put to sea, attacked the Russian fleet at Reval with loss only to the Swedes, and was moving slowly eastward along the coast of Finland. A line-of-battle ship, left refitting in Karlskrona harbour, was to bring Captain Smith to join the King.

Captain Smith desired one thing only—to join the Swedish fleet before it engaged in any more battles. He was away with a favouring breeze within three days of landing at Karlskrona.

In Stockholm the Lady Ingrid Hellner heard of her captain's arrival. Her messenger, coming to Karlskrona a day too late, returned with the news that Captain Smith had sailed for Finland.

The Lady Ingrid narrowed her green eyes until they were very like a cat's. Then she took her pen and wrote a long and pitiful letter. She addressed it to the Count Dona, commanding His Majesty's Combined Regiments of Foot, with the Royal Fleet off Finland.

The light of early morning, diffused through a low sky of clouds, had a grey-green tinge, making the piled canvas of the four ships pale and ghostly as bergs of ice. Three were frigates, moving to and fro in company across the open water which was the mouth of the Wyborg gulf. The fourth, a fast yacht, lay hove-to nearer the fir-clad islands. She was the *Amphion*, placed by King Gustavus at the service of his naval adviser Colonel Sidney Smith, and she watched for the emergence of the remainder of the Army Fleet.

Presently, creeping slowly out of the narrows between two islands, came the low square sails of a bomb-ketch. Another followed, and another; seven in all. They headed towards the yacht. At their tail came an apparently endless procession of craft: this was the Army Fleet of Sweden whose final purpose was to take the island fortress of Kronstadt and threaten St. Petersburg itself.

As the last gunboat drew clear of the green shores the *Amphion* paid off and went racing before the breeze towards the three frigates. When the yacht was two cables-length short of the leading frigate, whose mainmast wore the Swedish Royal Standard, she bore up and sent away a boat. Five minutes later Captain Sidney Smith, in a fore-and-aft cocked hat and a blue boat-cloak lined with gold, stepped briskly on to the quarterdeck and saluted the King.

Gustavus III was at this time forty-four years old, a man of about the captain's own build, but of a sallow complexion. Brilliant eyes, high forehead, mobile mouth, all spoke of the poet turned man of action. He wore a uniform resembling that of an English Admiral of the Fleet, except that the tailed coat was of a much lighter blue and the long cloak of the Order of the Sword, crimson with a white lining, was not a garment such as was seen on the decks of British warships. His breast glittered with medals and stars. A little behind him stood the frigate's captain, a granite-faced veteran in sky-blue, and Colonel Lillihorn of the Guards, in scarlet.

"Sir," said Captain Smith, "your Army Fleet is ready to cross the gulf or to sail on Wyborg, as you think fit."

Gustavus smiled and nodded. "In my cabin, gentlemen," he said, in his mellifluous French, and led the way below.

The chart that was spread on the cabin table showed the inner or eastern end of the Gulf of Finland, a broad two-pronged fork of island-dotted sea. The King placed his forefinger at the base of the upper prong.

"Here, then," he said, "we are arrived, my friends. We may

land our army at Pitkapas to march northward, while we sail with gunboats and bomb-ketches to destroy the squadron of the Prince Nassau in Wyborg harbour—here. Or we may join with my Grand Fleet and make a direct attack upon Kronstadt "—he indicated the tip of the lower prong—" landing the army to threaten St. Petersburg from the north. I require your opinions, gentlemen."

" Your Majesty and gentlemen," said the captain, his lean face very earnest, " as I see it, the position is this :

" We have the fleet of Kronstadt before us, and the Reval fleet behind us. Your Majesty's only safe move is to fight a decisive action with your Grand Fleet against one or other of these forces . . ."

A young naval *aide* entered and saluted.

" The Count Dona, Your Majesty, commanding your Combined Regiments of Foot, and Colonel Branting of the Artillery."

" So ? Let them come in."

As the *aide* departed two officers entered the cabin, adding a uniform of yellow with green facings and a uniform of green with blue facings to the already many-hued group.

" This is unexpected, Count," said Gustavus, frowning. " I am in council."

The officer in yellow and green bowed his head and then raised it defiantly. Captain Smith eyed him curiously, knowing that he looked at the dissipated betrayer of the Lady Ingrid. The man he saw was not according to expectation. Count Dona was a fresh-coloured young man whose dashing good looks were for the moment marred by the out-thrust of an aggressive jaw. He spoke loudly and with determination.

" Your Majesty, I am here to propose a council—a council of all your senior officers, including your brother the Duke and Admiral Modée from the Grand Fleet. With all deference I submit that Your Majesty has been ill-advised. I submit that a council should be called to deliberate upon the best means of returning to Sweden."

The King moved his frowning gaze to Captain Smith.

" When you gentlemen arrived," he said, " my English adviser, Colonel Smith, was about to give his views on the situation."

Captain Smith leant forward eagerly.

" Gentlemen," said he, " we need a victory to give our forces confidence—it must be won by the Grand Fleet. Observe. There is a fleet in Kronstadt and a fleet in Reval, or thereabouts. The Grand Fleet outnumbers either of these, but not both together. A threat to Kronstadt should bring out that fleet to be destroyed. But better still there is little doubt that Tchichakoff with the Reval fleet will come up the Gulf to take us in the rear. Him, therefore, we should seek to engage first."

" Your Majesty," cried Count Dona, " this would be folly. One

fleet under the guns of Kronstadt, the other heaven knows where. I submit that we have no alternative but to withdraw while we may. Your Majesty's expedition has accomplished much—"

"Much!" Captain Smith could not restrain his incredulous scorn. "You call that war—to capture one village and make a few bonfires in Finland!"

King Gustavus raised his hand. "Colonel Smith," he said, "you go too far."

"I ask pardon of you, sir," Smith said boldly, "but not of these gentlemen. Possibly they do not know your full intention, which is—forgive me if I err—to bring to an end the Russian oppression of your territories by opposing force to force. In short, to fight and defeat the Russians by land and sea."

"That is quite correct, Colonel," the King said evenly.

Captain Smith swung round to face the four officers.

"Then, gentlemen," he said, with sudden gentleness, "it must now be apparent to you that to return to Sweden with our ships and guns undamaged and the oppressor still at large, would be more than a dereliction of duty. It would be dishonour."

"It's apparent to me," snarled the Count, "that His Majesty has a thoroughly rash and incompetent adviser!"

"Count Dona!" Captain Smith's voice was icy, his chin well up. "I am the mildest of men—"

Dull but unmistakable came the boom of a cannon.

The naval *aide* burst in unceremoniously. "Your Majesty!" he panted. "It's a frigate from the Grand Fleet—she fired to call our attention to her signal!"

"What signal is it?" demanded Gustavus peremptorily, rising.

"The agreed code, Your Majesty—the Kronstadt fleet sighted to northward."

"Damme!" said Captain Smith. "We've got 'em!"

Gustavus, his dark face alight, faced his officers. "Gentlemen, I am sending Colonel Smith to my brother with orders to attack the Kronstadt fleet immediately. Count Dona and Colonel Branting will return to their respective commands. The Army Fleet will anchor here to await the result of this battle."

"One moment, sir," Smith had a finger on the chart, "Why not cross the mouth of the Wyborg gulf with your guns and transports? With the Kronstadt fleet broken, your gunboats can advance along the coast to Kronstadt, your army march by land along a straight coastline."

The King was studying the chart intently.

"The Russians have forces there," he said. "On the peninsula of Actis Capel, where I must land my men, there are forts."

"True, sir. But observe this line of islands along the toe of the

peninsula." He stabbed a finger at them. "Invest those, make your base on this one—Bisköpson—and with the support of the Grand Fleet you'll clear the peninsula. Then—St. Petersburg, sir!"

Gustavus nodded, his eyes gleaming.

"It shall be so." He turned to the others. "We cross to Bisköpson at once. Colonel Lillihorn, you will go with Count Dona. Colonel Smith, you will board yonder frigate and take my orders to the Duke of Sudermania. Remain with him until the destruction of the Kronstadt fleet is accomplished."

The farcical battle of June 5th is not mentioned in the histories of Sweden; in the history-books of Tsarist Russia it appears as a Russian victory. The Kronstadt fleet, seventeen sail of the line to the Swedes' twenty-one and five frigates, were concerned only to prevent what they took for a sea attack on their capital and its defending fortress. They manœuvred to prevent a break-through to northward, keeping their stations and awaiting attack; attack that was never effectively made.

From noon to dusk, and on into the half-light of the northern night, the Grand Fleet sailed up and down exchanging long-range cannonade, while Captain Smith argued and pleaded with the Duke of Sudermania's admirals and captains to attack, to engage, to force those ship-to-ship duels which alone could bring the victory that must be won.

When the intermittent boom of the futile guns slackened at the darkest hour of night Captain Smith changed his tactics. From the Duke's steward he obtained two bottles of cognac. He succeeded in getting himself and Charles of Sudermania into the latter's cabin alone. He locked the door.

Summoning his weary mind to the task, he brought his most forcible arguments to bear once more. For every argument he refilled the Duke's glass. By dawn he had won his case.

Those captains and *aides* of the Duke of Sudermania who were on the quarterdeck in the grey light of a cloudy morning were startled by the arrival of their prince, hatless and fiery-faced.

"Attack! Make the signal!" roared the Duke.

His flag-captain, a grey-faced little man, was daring to venture a protest as he mounted the quarterdeck ladder.

"I must call Your Highness's attention to our left," he was saying. "Admiral Modée and his ships have become out of touch with us in the night."

Smith swung round to face the Duke.

"Sir, with your permission I'll go to Admiral Modée myself. I ask you to signal the frigate there to take me."

"Yes, yes, of course." The Duke flung an order to his captain.

" But, Sidney, I need you here, beside me. What shall I—"

" Bring your ships up, but keep out of range, sir. A gun shall be the signal that your left is about to attack. When you hear it, engage closely with every ship."

Captain Smith was over the flagship's side before the Duke could protest. Twenty minutes later he looked back from the deck of the speeding frigate and saw the fourteen line-of-battle ships moving slowly, in line, towards the distant Russians.

By nine o'clock of that grey morning Captain Smith was on board the 74-gun ship commanded by Admiral Modée. The captain succeeded in impressing his orders upon him and was relieved to find that the Baron Modée, at least, was prepared to take his ships into action.

The enemy ships were in plain sight now, beating slowly in line ahead to the west. There was a sudden cry from a lieutenant at the starboard rail. He had a glass to his eye, directed at the Swedish main fleet.

" Signal, sir—recall ! " he shouted.

Captain Smith, who had wellnigh forgotten the existence of anything but the enemy, ran to his side. He stood staring, incredulous, at that ignominious rabble of ships. Charles of Sudermania had failed him after all. Of course there was nothing to be done but to draw off again—seven ships could not engage seventeen with any hope of victory. It was a bitter blow indeed.

" Sir," said the Admiral, " it is explained. Look yonder."

Smith followed the direction of the pointing arm. They had come within half a mile of the main fleet, which had now formed into line and was reaching to westward. Beyond it, on the grey line of the southern horizon, appeared a group of tiny white dots.

" The Reval fleet ! " he exclaimed.

" Admiral Tchichakoff's ships," nodded the Admiral.

The captain's drawn face relaxed.

" Sir," he cried, " I must board His Highness as soon as possible. Will you have the kindness to make a signal to the flagship ? "

Within fifteen minutes Captain Smith was clambering up the flagship's side. On her quarterdeck he found chaos. Officers of all ranks gesticulated and argued round a small chart-table. In the middle of the throng stood a pitiably bewildered gentleman with a face like blotched lard. He saw the captain, flung out his plump arms to clear a space, and squeaked at him dolorously.

" What are we to do ? " quavered the Duke. " They advise me, Sidney, that our only hope is to make westward "—he dabbed nervously at the chart—" slip past the left of Tchichakoff's line, and head southward for the open sea. But my brother—"

" Your Highness ! " Captain Smith made his voice ring.

"There can be no man so vile that he would abandon his King to the enemy in such fashion! Our first need is to protect His Majesty and the Army Fleet, who are here at the east side of the entrance to the Wyborg gulf. Our second is to protect our rear. Place your fleet across the mouth of the Wyborg gulf, sir—a line that cannot be outflanked."

The Duke flung his arms about the captain.

"Sidney," he cried, "I believe you were sent by heaven to save us!"

It was near nightfall before the Grand Fleet, with its frigates in the long line, had anchored across the twenty-mile entrance of the Gulf of Wyborg. The Russian fleets, having joined, pursued until dusk, sounding as they came, and drew off to lie well out of range. The left of the long Swedish line rested on the island of Bisköpson, where the Army Fleet and the King lay close under the wooded shore; and to the King went Captain Smith in the Duke's galley to make his report.

The Gulf of Wyborg resembles roughly an inverted V in shape, having the little Finnish port of Wyborg at its apex. Here in the spring of 1790 a Russian flotilla—mostly frigates, sloops and other lesser craft—had been refitting; the spies of King Gustavus had informed him that the Russian Prince Nassau was in command there. Wyborg is the most sheltered of ports, being protected by a screen of islands stretching from half-way up the left-hand stroke of the inverted V to a long peninsula, called Actis Capel, that juts from half-way up the right-hand stroke. The Swedish Grand Fleet, a palisade of tall ships fronting the greatly superior Russian fleet on the south, was drawn across the open mouth of the V. Thus, as the King's officers were only too eager to point out, the entire Swedish force, army and navy, was surrounded by enemies.

Many and disputatious were the councils of war held on board the King's galley *Seraphim* during the nine days of that blockade. Captain Smith, unflagging in his endless and thankless struggle with the obstructionists, had advocated a feint attack by the Grand Fleet upon the Russian ships who waited so patiently out of range. This feint would enable the army fleet to cross the mouth of the gulf and gain the shelter of those westward islands beyond Pitkapas—the route by which they had come—and so at length to the open Baltic and Swedish waters. He had not dared to propose the attack on Wyborg which his own spirit prompted; the leaders were unanimous in declaring that their men would only fight to get back to their homes. Yet the naval chiefs, with Charles of Sudermania apologetically supporting them, refused to take the hazard of an attempt to break the blockade.

It was now obvious to the blindest, however, that the Russians counted on starving them into surrender. Captain Smith, grown cunning, continued to advocate his sea project of escape, at the same time contriving to bring forward the undoubted superiority of the Swedish troops. He had the satisfaction of hearing Count Dona himself, after contemptuously repudiating Smith's proposals, suggest as the only possible course the capture of Wyborg.

The upshot of all this was that Gustavus in person, with Captain Smith and his senior naval captain, Sillen, were rowed in the early hours of a hazy morning to reconnoitre the island barrier that defended the upper end of the gulf. They found that the two long islands, Sommansari and Uransari, had been fortified with batteries, as had the wooded promontory of Actis Capel to which the eastern tip of Uransari almost reached. They saw in the Trongsund, which is the main passage between the two islands, "four large square-rigged vessels, about twelve large galleys, and many smaller vessels." The Prince Nassau was doing his part in the counter-blockade. They rowed back safely, determined to make the attempt.

Delays and divisions of opinions brought the date to June 17th before the King's forces stole by night out of the Biorko Sund. The attackers were in three divisions. One was to pass through the channel between Sommansari and the mainland, on the left, and the troops from the galleys were to land on Sommansari and take the batteries there. The centre division, under the King's command, consisted of the deeper-draught vessels of the army fleet and would force the main passage of the Trongsund. This party would land troops on Uransari and subdue the batteries there. The third force, on the right, had to deal with the peninsula of Actis Capel—a danger-spot not only because of the batteries which commanded the channel between the peninsula and Uransari, but because, being part of the mainland, the Russian troops could mass there. This last force, gunboats and transport galleys, was composed of the King's Guards, under Colonel Lillihorn, and the Grenadiers led by Count Dona. With them went Captain Smith, whom Gustavus had insisted on placing in command of the whole expedition. The non-combatant Englishman, a half-pay captain, became in effect commander-in-chief of the Swedish Army.

Captain Smith stood at the rail of his tiny quarterdeck gazing aft to where the snake-like line of galleys, the leading boat only a few fathoms from *Amphion*'s stern, trailed between the wooded shores.

Slowly the narrows opened out before the *Amphion*. On the left the long coast of Uransari stretched away at right angles to their course, on the right the northern side of the Actis Capel peninsula, shelving beaches below pine-clad headlands, fell back less abruptly.

The captain's darting glance saw that all was being done perfectly. All seemed set for success. If the other divisions took each its island objective Wyborg would be at the King's mercy.

" Gentlemen," said Captain Smith, " we land on a broad front and advance at once. You will take charge of—"

" There ! " exclaimed Colonel Lillihorn, holding up his hand.

From far away to the north-west came the sound of an irregular cannonade.

" That will awaken our friends ashore," observed the captain. " We must hurry."

He stepped down to the main deck, the others following. Before they could cross it to the bulwarks the pine woods above seemed to dissolve in red flame. A storm of shot whistled and thudded about the *Amphion*, the air was rent by the thunder of the discharge. At Smith's side Colonel Lillihorn cried out and clutched his shoulder. The shrill blast of the captain's whistle echoed the roar of cannon, and at once the galleys were poling in to the shore. Again the hidden battery thundered ; but now the gunboats were replying, the balls screaming overhead.

They leapt into the shallows, the *aides* following, and waded ashore. All along the beach guardsmen in scarlet and grenadiers in green were landing and forming in line while the gunboats pounded the woods above.

" I shall advance with you, Count," panted Captain Smith.

As he spoke there was a tremendous explosion among the trees. A shell from a gunboat had found the battery's magazine.

The uneven line of grenadiers, bayonetted muskets held at the ready, swept forward at the Count's order. On their right Lillihorn's Guards, on the left Sillen waving a cutlass at the head of his sailors, dashed up the beach. Captain Smith, his drawn sword in his hand, led the way between the close-set boles of the trees ; but always at his elbow was Count Dona.

The trees thinned a little way above the beach, and as the grenadiers reached this point a hail of musket-balls swept down from a thicket on the higher ground, where red-and-gold mitre-caps showed between the branches. Smith fell flat on the pine-needles, dragging the Count with him.

" The Empress's Life Guards," he shouted in the other's ear. " One shot, and then the bayonet—tell your men ! "

The Count's eyes flashed angrily, but he turned and bellowed at the men behind him. Kneeling, they sent a ragged fire at the concealed foe and then rose with a wild yell to charge at the heels of the English captain and the Swedish Count. There was a brief and bloody encounter among the pines. Then the Russians broke, fled, flung down their arms. Out of the trees on the left charged Sillen and

his tars to round up the flying Life Guards. Captain Smith, the Count as always close beside him, ran on to where the guns of the battery, deserted save for two or three wounded gunners, stood in a clearing overlooking the beach. An *aide*, breathless, ran up.

"The Guards have the battery on the point, Colonel," he gasped.

Smith nodded. "Then Actis Capel is ours."

He detailed the *aide* and six grenadiers to push inland, scouting for the enemy, and turned to greet Captain Sillen. The veteran seaman was scarcely able to stand.

"They have—a bellyful," he muttered through his teeth.

As he spoke a Guards officer and a private soldier came through the trees supporting between them the tall form of Colonel Lillihorn.

"The battery on the point is captured," said the colonel faintly. "We have more than a hundred prisoners. I can do no more." He jerked his head to indicate the officer who supported him. "Major Lindman will command."

"Major," said Smith at once, "eight of your men to take Colonel Lillihorn and Captain Sillen back to my yacht."

Sillen began to protest, but he was cut short by the arrival of two grenadier officers. They reported that two hundred prisoners, Life Guards and artillerymen, had been taken; that the Swedes had lost seven men killed; and that the peninsula was clear of the enemy as far as its narrowest part.

Captain Smith rapped his orders swiftly, while the far-off boom of cannon told of a fight still raging on the islands. Major Lindman and the Guards were to hold Actis Capel and the neck of the peninsula. He himself, with Count Dona and his grenadiers and Sillen's sailors, would cross the narrows and land on Uransari.

The dull thunder of distant batteries supported his words. Count Dona turned silently sullen to rally his men. Ten minutes later, with the triumphant grenadiers eager behind them, they scrambled down to the narrows. It was a part of the plan concerted with the King that if Actis Capel were taken Smith should attack Uransari from the south to reinforce the King's advance from the north, and he had ordered three galleys to await them at the narrows.

They crossed the still waters of the strait as the first rays of the sun lit the treetops. Up the steep foreshore and into the red corridors of the pine trunks they passed, alert for the first signs of the Russians. In the lead walked Captain Smith; beside him, gloomy and silent, paced Count Dona.

Only the ceaseless booming of the guns to northward, much closer now, told of the enemy massed ahead of them and concentrating a fire on the attack from that quarter. Captain Smith wondered

that the King had not succeeded in silencing that battery. He must have landed and attacked long ago.

A shout and a musket-shot echoed among the trees. Others followed. A glimpse of white uniforms gleaming in the new-risen sun told that they had reached the Russian outposts. More slowly now they advanced, exchanging desultory shots as the outposts retreated. Smith ordered detachments well out on the flanks. It would be disastrous, with no supporting force in their rear, to be outflanked. They moved forward, aware now of a lightening among the trees in front. The fire of the outposts ceased, and the captain saw the white uniforms scampering for cover. The Swedes halted at the edge of a clearing. Massed in formation there stood the white-coated Russians; and behind them, on a slight eminence, gleamed the squat shapes of four field-pieces.

The Count withdrew his men a few yards into the wood. Smith squatted on his haunches beside the Count and conferred hurriedly.

"His Majesty must have met with stubborn resistance," he said. "The battery is still firing to northward. And yet these white-coats—they outnumber us, I think—are still free to oppose us."

"So the dashing Captain Smith will run away?" sneered the Count. "I warn you—I shall not run."

Whatever reply the captain would have made was forestalled by the deafening voice of a gun. The ball crashed into the trees, sending long splinters flying like spears, and a man screamed in agony. Another shot followed swiftly, and another.

"Every man flat!" roared Captain Smith, measuring his length in the sparse undergrowth.

A man, exhausted, in a blue uniform, crawled to his side and thrust a crumpled package into the captain's hand. It was a dispatch from the King.

> "*I wait*," it ran, "*for news from you to decide my retreat, or a false attack here in the front, while yours may succeed in the rear. I fear the attack on Uransari will be impossible, for they have felled the trees which gave cover for an advance on the battery.*"

Gustavus had not even attempted to land. There was nothing left but to retreat. Smith turned to communicate his decision to Count Dona. The Count was no longer at his side. He had crawled forward to the verge of the wood, and as the captain espied him he leaped to his feet, sword in hand.

"Forward! Charge!" he screamed, and sprang into the open.

The grenadiers scrambled up and hurled themselves after him. But Captain Smith was before them and sprinting madly across that three hundred yards of deadly ground at the Count's heels.

Muskets flashed, the field-pieces roared. The air shrieked with

its burden of flying lead. Green uniforms on either hand crumpled and fell, but the grenadiers stormed on. They were into the Russians, the Swedes yelling like fiends and plying the bayonets which had won them Actis Capel. Captain Smith swept aside a musket-barrel and cut down its owner, dodged the sweeping downstroke of a Russian sabre, and was through the line and racing for the guns. From the corner of his eye he saw Count Dona running beside him stride for stride.

Together they gained the battery, half a dozen grenadiers close behind them. The blue-clad gunners who stood to fight were cut down or swept into mad retreat. The guns were won. Had their little force taken Uransari after all ?

Smith cast a swift glance round the clearing. He saw the white coats—such as were not lying still or writhing among the birch-scrub—flying for the cover of a little wood. He saw, too, that the eminence where the guns were placed overlooked a steep descent, with young trees sloping evenly down to the blue water of a little bay. Over the tops of the trees he could see two barges laden with armed men heading in for the invisible shore, and three unladen barges standing off. The Russians were landing reinforcements from the mainland.

The grenadiers, forty or fifty of them, were rallying on the guns, and the Count, a patch of red spreading on his white breeches, was hastily forming them to withstand the counter-attack which might come from that little wood.

" A dozen men to these guns ! " shouted the captain.

The Count whirled, his brow black with anger. Smith brushed him aside and thrust the strongest men bodily to the field-pieces. If he could get them bearing on the point at which the reinforcements must emerge from the trees there might yet be a chance. He heaved and sweated with the rest and got one gun turned.

It was too late. Before it could be loaded a burst of musket-fire crackled from the woods above the bay. Up the slope, firing, re-loading, advancing with drill-square regularity, came a double line of men in blue-green uniforms and brass helmets that dazzled in the sunshine. Simultaneously a bugle blared from the wood on their other flank and a line of whitecoats advanced at a run.

" Form square ! " yelled the Count above the racket.

The Swedes had time to fire one volley before the Russians from the boats charged up the slope, yelling like savages.

There was a timeless period of whirling steel and desperate hand-to-hand fighting, oaths and screams and the clash of blades. Then the Russians bore down their opponents by sheer weight of numbers. The Swedes broke and ran. Captain Smith, stepping back as he parried a thrust from a Russian blade, tripped and fell between two of the field-pieces. The blade stabbed downwards,

ripping the sleeve from his shoulder but scarcely cutting the flesh. The stabber was swept on and away by the rush of his fellows. And suddenly the battery was clear of the enemy.

Captain Smith raised himself on one elbow. Green uniforms and white lay heaped about the guns. The yells and shrieks of pursuit and flight were distant now. He seemed the only living man there in that circle of dead round the guns. Then, looking up, he saw Count Dona.

The man was supporting himself with one hand on the wheel of a cannon. In the other was his sword. He stared down at the prostrate captain and his blue eyes flamed hate.

" Seducer—traitor ! " he snarled. " This for Ingrid ! "

He whirled up his sword. Captain Smith braced himself for the blow. He heard the thud as the musket-ball struck, saw the brandished blade waver and drop harmlessly to the ground. Count Dona sank in a huddled heap across the legs of his enemy.

The captain dragged himself clear and knelt beside the Count.

" In the name of heaven, man ! " said the captain, puzzled and exasperated rather than angry. " Why am I to be murdered ? What has passed between the Lady Ingrid and myself is no affair of yours ! "

" You lie ! " said the Count faintly. " I am her affianced husband. She has told me how you seduced her, how you abandoned her—"

He choked. A trickle of blood came from his lips. Captain Smith stared at him, motionless. He saw, not the stained boyish face of Count Dona, but the small heart-shaped face, the green eyes like a cat's, of Ingrid Hellner. He understood.

" If you ever loved her," gasped Count Dona, " get back to the boats—take her—this."

He held out a large gold locket, open in his palm. It was a miniature of the Lady Ingrid ; but across the delicately coloured portrait had flowed the wet crimson of her lover's blood.

The captain thrust the trinket into his pocket. He peered cautiously between the cannon which had sheltered them. Two hundred yards away a party of white-coated soldiers was forming under the orders of an officer. Between the battery and the woods to southward the way was open. But that three hundred yards of coverless ground, patched with sprawling bodies, was no way for him.

He bent over the Count, who raised a feeble hand, seeming to thrust him away.

" By God, you'll go with me ! " said Captain Smith in English. " Murderer or no, you've played the man this day ! "

In a flash he had the Count slung across his shoulders and was walking away from the battery, keeping the guns between himself

and the Russians. He was walking downhill, in the direction from which the reinforcements had come, and he knew that at any moment other detachments might come that way from the bay below.

Well below the crest and out of sight of those in the clearing above, he turned and made along the hillside towards the edge of the upper woods. Without incident he gained them.

After the turmoil and clamour of the fighting the woods were very peaceful. From far away came an occasional muted shout, but the firing had ceased. He kept on, bent, staggering, sweating. The ground began to fall slightly. He could not be a quarter of a mile from the southern tip of the island.

Suddenly, from the dense woods in front, came the crash of many footsteps in the undergrowth and the sound of voices. Running through the trees came three Russian soldiers, their sabres drawn.

The captain ran. Half-blinded with sweat, his knees seeming to buckle under him at every step, he ran. A musket cracked and the shot hummed past to bury itself in a tree. That was bad—but the slope was steepening. Something glittered between the trunks of the trees, down there—the waters of the narrows.

Again the musket fired. But now he was out of the trees, stumbling down a pebbly slope that seemed somehow familiar. There was water close in front, and a boat pulling in. The boat was full of men and they were firing. At him? No—over his head. Now there was water about his legs. Someone was lifting the Count from his back. Hands grasped at him and dragged him over a boat's gunwale. As his legs gave under him he remembered his command.

"All forces—withdraw," he gasped, and sank into blessed oblivion.

The defeat, or failure, afterwards known as the battle of Actis Capel, lost King Gustavus four hundred men. Among them was Count Dona, who died three hours after reaching the boats. It had one inevitable result: the plan that Captain Sidney Smith had advocated from the first had to be adopted. Three days later the Grand Fleet broke its line and attacked. The army fleet crossed the Wyborg gulf in safety, and the price paid was the loss of one ship which went aground due to faulty navigation. The Russian Admiral Tchichakoff, foiled of an easy prey, wisely drew off his ships and made all haste to the Svenska Sund, through which the Swedish fleets must pass to regain home and safety.

His Grace the Duke of Leeds, waddling along the arched and gilded hall of Boodle's Club between coffee-room and library, was justly irritated to hear someone jabbering in a language that was not

English. Foreigners ! In Boodle's ! God bless his soul, what next ? Have 'em in the Cabinet at this rate.

He rounded a projecting pillar and came upon the jabberers. They were, he perceived, the Swedish Ambassador and another nobleman of the same nation. He was about to pass by when the Ambassador bowed. The Duke nodded, writhing his large red face into a transient smile of courtesy, and prepared to waddle on. But the Ambassador evidently wished to communicate something.

" Your Grace has heard the news ? " he said. His thin features were flushed with excitement.

" No," said the Duke. " No. What news ? "

" There has been a great sea-fight, Your Grace, in the Svenska Sund—a great victory over the Russians."

" Eh ? Eh ? " The Duke goggled at him. Fellow was drunk, possibly. " Nonsense, man. We're not at war with Russia or anybody else."

" Your Grace misunderstands," said the Swede. " The victory is Sweden's. There were but twenty ships against the Russians' thirty-one. The dispatch from His Majesty King Gustavus speaks of five ships and as many frigates captured, four thousand Russian prisoners, and vast quantities of stores taken. For the direction and inspiration of the victory—I quote His Majesty's words—the credit must be given to an English officer, Captain Sidney Smith. Your Grace doubtless knows Captain Smith."

The name struck some remote chord in the Duke's memory. Smith ? Sweden ?

" Good God, yes," said His Grace. " Perfect pest of a fellow."

" King Gustavus has been pleased to create him a Knight Commander of the Order of the Sword, Your Grace."

The Duke stared, nodded, and made for the haven of the library. An English half-pay captain to be a Swedish knight ! Ridiculous ! Some rapscallion had appropriated his favourite armchair. He lowered himself into another and gazed blankly at the wall.

A thousand miles away, in a white-and-gold parlour in the Bergsgatan, sat a lovely lady. She, too, was gazing blankly at the wall. In her lap was a gold locket, open, its delicate portrait obliterated by a horrid brown stain.

★*Having cleared up King Gustavus's spot of trouble, Captain Sir Sidney Smith was doing a little leisurely exploring in the Near East when the Call to Duty reached him. Next month's episode will reveal Sir Sidney's unorthodox way of rejoining His Majesty's Fleet and how he dealt with England's enemies.*

OFF THE RATION

The wild vicissitudes of taste!

SAMUEL JOHNSON

Henry the King . . . wishes and orders that our dear and beloved Lady Lucy be provided with the following maintenance in her own room.

Firstly : Every morning for breakfast, one whole fillet of beef, a four pound loaf, a fruit tart, and a gallon of strong beer.

Idem : At dinner, a piece of salt beef, a slice of roast beef, some fricassé from Our kitchen, a four pound loaf and a gallon of strong beer.

Idem : At supper, a plate of vegetables, a joint of mutton, a plate of delicacies taken from Our kitchen, a three pound loaf, and a gallon of strong beer.

Idem : For late supper, before going to bed, a two pound loaf, a cake, and half a gallon of wine from Our cellar.

From the *Livre des Singularities*

Sea Food

This Bouillabaisse a noble dish is—
A sort of soup or broth, or brew,
Or hotchpotch, of all sorts of fishes,
That Greenwich never could outdo ;
Green herbs, red peppers, mussels, saffern,
Soles, onions, garlic, roach, and dace ;
All these you eat at Terré's tavern,
In that one dish of Bouillabaisse.

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY, *The Ballad of Bouillabaisse*

Bonne Bouche

Merlyn took a dead mouse out of his skull-cap—" I always keep them there," he explained, " and worms too, for fishing. I find it most convenient "—and handed it to the Wart, who held it out rather gingerly towards Archimedes (the owl). The nutty little curved beak looked as if it were capable of doing damage, but Archimedes looked closely at the mouse, blinked at the Wart, moved nearer on the finger, closed his eyes and leaned forward. He stood there with closed eyes and an expression of rapture on his face, as if he were saying grace, and then, with the absurdest little sideways

nibble, took the morsel so gently that he would not have broken a soap bubble. He remained leaning forward with closed eyes, with the mouse suspended from his beak, as if he were not sure what to do with it. Then he lifted his right foot—he was right-handed—and took hold of the mouse. He held it up like a boy holding a stick of rock or a constable with his truncheon, looked at it, nibbled its tail. He turned it round so that it was head first, for the Wart had offered it the wrong way round, and gave one gulp. He looked round at the company with the tail hanging out of the corner of his mouth—as much as to say, " I wish you would not all stare at me so "—turned his head away, politely swallowed the tail, scratched his sailor's beard with his left toe, and began to ruffle out his feathers.

T. H. WHITE, *The Sword in the Stone*

Austerity

I have a little garden
That I'm cultivating lard in,
As the things I eat are rather tough and dry ;
For I live on toasted lizards,
Prickly pears and parrot gizzards,
And I'm really very fond of beetle pie.

CHARLES E. CARRYL

When The Pie Was Opened . . .

Forty-five years before she had served him with a dish even less to his taste . . .

At night, when he came home to tea, a handsome pie was placed before him, baked a beautiful golden-brown and with a pastry tulip on the top ; such a pie as must have seemed to him to illustrate the old saying : *' A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more you beat 'em the better they be.'*

" You cut it, Tom," said a smiling Queenie. " I made it a-purpose for you. Come, don't 'ee be afraid on it. 'Tis all for you." And she turned her back and pretended to be hunting for something in the cupboard.

Tom cut it ; then recoiled, for, curled up inside, was the leather strap with which he had beaten his wife. " 'A just went as white as a ghoo-ost, an' got up an' went out," said Queenie all those years later. " But it cured 'en, it cured 'en, for's not so much as laid a finger on me from that day to this ! ".

FLORA THOMPSON, *Lark Rise*

Mulligan Stew

Snow on the level, three feet deep,
Oh, Lord ! How the wind is blowing ;
We've eaten our caps and suspender straps,
And damned if it ain't still snowing.

We made a mulligan stew today
Of a candle, some soap, and a wisp of hay
Some small pine blocks, a pair o' socks,
A wood rat's nest, and a couple of rocks.

Tomorrow morn, at the peep of dawn,
We're going to leave this shack,
A trail to seek o'er mountain peak,
So long ! if we don't come back.

And in the Spring, when all nature sings,
Should you chance on this trail to come back,
If you run cross a couple of skeleton things,
You'll know it's just me and Jack.

Author Unknown

Amblongus à la Maison

Take 4 pounds (say 4½ pounds) of fresh Amblongusses, and put them in a small pipkin.

Cover them with water and boil them for 8 hours incessantly, after which add 2 pints of new milk, and proceed to boil for 4 hours more.

When you have ascertained that the Amblongusses are quite soft, take them out and place them in a wide pan, taking care to shake them well previously.

Grate some nutmeg over the surface, and cover them carefully with powdered gingerbread, curry-powder, and a sufficient quantity of cayenne pepper.

Remove the pan into the next room, and place it on the floor. Bring it back again, and let it simmer for three-quarters of an hour. Shake the pan violently till all the Amblongusses have become a pale purple colour.

Then, having prepared the paste, insert the whole carefully, adding at the same time a small pigeon, 2 slices of beef, 4 cauliflowers, and any number of oysters.

Watch patiently until the crust begins to rise, and add a pinch of salt from time to time.

Serve up in a clean dish, and throw the whole out of the window as fast as possible.

EDWARD LEAR

THE SHADES OF SPRING

"I am like a plant," she said, "I can only grow in my own soil"

by D. H. LAWRENCE

IT was a mile nearer through the wood. Mechanically, Syson turned up by the forge and lifted the field-gate. The blacksmith and his mate stood still, watching the trespasser. But Syson looked too much a gentleman to be accosted. They let him go on in silence across the small field to the wood.

There was not the least difference between this morning and those of the bright springs, six or eight years back. White and sandy-gold fowls still scratched round the gate, littering the earth and the field with feathers and scratched-up rubbish. Between the two thick holly bushes in the wood-hedge was the hidden gap, whose fence one climbed to get into the wood; the bars were scored just the same by the keeper's boots. He was back in the eternal.

Syson was extraordinarily glad. Like an uneasy spirit he had returned to the country of his past, and he found it waiting for him, unaltered. The hazel still spread glad little hands downwards, the bluebells here were still wan and few, among the lush grass and in shade of the bushes.

The path through the wood, on the very brow of a slope, ran winding easily for a time. All around were twiggy oaks, just issuing their gold, and floor spaces diapered with woodruff, with patches of dog-mercury and tufts of hyacinth. Two fallen trees still lay across the track. Syson jolted down a steep, rough slope, and came again upon the open land, this time looking north as through a great window in the wood. He stayed to gaze over the level fields of the hill-top, at the village which strewed the bare upland as if it had tumbled off the passing waggons of industry, and been forsaken. There was a stiff, modern, grey little church, and blocks and rows of red dwellings lying at random; at the back, the twinkling head-stocks of the pit, and the looming pit-hill. All was naked and out-of-doors, not a tree! It was quite unaltered.

Syson turned, satisfied, to follow the path that sheered downhill into the wood. He was curiously elated, feeling himself back in an enduring vision. He started. A keeper was standing a few yards in front, barring the way.

"Where might you be going this road, sir?" asked the man. The tone of his question had a challenging twang. Syson looked at the fellow with an impersonal, observant gaze. It was a young man of four or five-and-twenty, ruddy and well favoured. His dark blue eyes now stared aggressively at the intruder. His black moustache, very thick, was cropped short over a small, rather soft mouth. In every other respect the fellow was manly and good-looking. He stood just above middle height; the strong forward thrust of his chest, and the perfect ease of his erect, self-sufficient body, gave one the feeling that he was taut with animal life, like the thick jet of a fountain balanced in itself.

He stood with the butt of his gun on the ground, looking uncertainly and questioningly at Syson. The dark, restless eyes of the trespasser, examining the man and penetrating into him without heeding his office, troubled the keeper and made him flush.

"Where is Naylor? Have you got his job?" Syson asked.

"You're not from the House, are you?" inquired the keeper. It could not be, since every one was away.

"No, I'm not from the House," the other replied. It seemed to amuse him.

"Then might I ask where you were making for?" said the keeper, nettled.

"Where I am making for?" Syson repeated. "I am going to Willey-Water Farm."

"This isn't the road."

"I think so. Down this path, past the well, and out by the white gate."

"But that's not the public road."

"I suppose not. I used to come so often, in Naylor's time, I had forgotten. Where is he, by the way?"

"Crippled with rheumatism," the keeper answered reluctantly.

"Is he?" Syson exclaimed in pain.

"And who might you be?" asked the keeper, with a new intonation.

"John Adderley Syson; I used to live in Cordy Lane."

"Used to court Hilda Millership?"

Syson's eyes opened with a pained smile. He nodded. There was an awkward silence.

"And you—who are you?" asked Syson.

"Arthur Pilbeam—Naylor's my uncle," said the other.

"You live here in Nuttall?"

"I'm lodgin' at my uncle's—at Naylor's."

"I see!"

"Did you say you was goin' down to Willey-Water?" asked the keeper.

" Yes."

There was a pause of some moments, before the keeper blurted : " *I'm* courtin' Hilda Millership."

The young fellow looked at the intruder with a stubborn defiance, almost pathetic. Syson opened new eyes.

" Are you ? " he said, astonished. The keeper flushed dark.

" She and me are keeping company," he said.

" I didn't know ! " said Syson. The other man waited uncomfortably.

" What, is the thing settled ? " asked the intruder.

" How, settled ? " retorted the other sulkily.

" Are you going to get married soon, and all that ? "

The keeper stared in silence for some moments, impotent.

" I suppose so," he said, full of resentment.

" Ah ! " Syson watched closely.

" I'm married myself," he added, after a time.

" You are ? " said the other incredulously.

Syson laughed in his brilliant, unhappy way.

" This last fifteen months," he said.

The keeper gazed at him with wide, wondering eyes, apparently thinking back, and trying to make things out.

" Why, didn't you know ? " asked Syson.

" No, I didn't," said the other sulkily.

There was silence for a moment.

" Ah well ! " said Syson, " I will go on. I suppose I may." The keeper stood in silent opposition. The two men hesitated in the open, grassy space, set around with small sheaves of sturdy bluebells ; a little open platform on the brow of the hill. Syson took a few indecisive steps forward, then stopped.

" I say, how beautiful ! " he cried.

He had come in full view of the downslope. The wide path ran from his feet like a river, and it was full of bluebells, save for a green winding thread down the centre, where the keeper walked. Like a stream the path opened into azure shallows at the levels, and there were pools of bluebells, with still the green thread winding through, like a thin current of ice-water through blue lakes. And from under the twig-purple of the bushes swam the shadowed blue, as if the flowers lay in flood water over the woodland.

" Ah, isn't it lovely ! " Syson exclaimed ; this was his past, the country he had abandoned, and it hurt him to see it so beautiful. Wood-pigeons cooed overhead, and the air was full of the brightness of birds singing.

" If you're married, what do you keep writing to her for, and sending her poetry books and things ? " asked the keeper. Syson stared at him, taken aback and humiliated. Then he began to smile.

" Well," he said, " I did not know about you . . ."

Again the keeper flushed darkly.

" But if you are married—" he charged.

" I am," answered the other cynically.

Then, looking down the blue, beautiful path, Syson felt his own humiliation. " What right *have* I to hang on to her ? " he thought, bitterly self-contemptuous.

" She knows I'm married and all that," he said.

" But you keep sending her books," challenged the keeper.

Syson, silenced, looked at the other man quizzically, half pitying. Then he turned.

" Good day," he said, and was gone. Now, everything irritated him : the two sallows, one all gold and perfume and murmur, one silver-green and bristly, reminded him that here he had taught her about pollination. What a fool he was ! What god-forsaken folly it all was !

" Ah well," he said to himself ; " the poor devil seems to have a grudge against me. I'll do my best for him." He grinned to himself, in a very bad temper.

The farm was less than a hundred yards from the wood's edge. The wall of trees formed the fourth side to the open quadrangle. The house faced the wood. With tangled emotions, Syson noted the plum blossom falling on the profuse, coloured primroses, which he himself had brought here and set. How they had increased ! There were thick tufts of scarlet, and pink, and pale purple primroses under the plum trees. He saw somebody glance at him through the kitchen window, heard men's voices.

The door opened suddenly : very womanly she had grown ! He felt himself going pale.

" You ?—Addy ! " she exclaimed, and stood motionless.

" Who ? " called the farmer's voice. Men's low voices answered. Those low voices, curious and almost jeering, roused the tormented spirit in the visitor. Smiling brilliantly at her, he waited.

" Myself—why not ? " he said.

The flush burned very deep on her cheek and throat.

" We are just finishing dinner," she said.

" Then I will stay outside." He made a motion to show that he would sit on the red earthenware pipkin that stood near the door among the daffodils, and contained the drinking water.

" Oh no, come in," she said hurriedly. He followed her. In the doorway, he glanced swiftly over the family, and bowed. Every one was confused. The farmer, his wife, and the four sons sat at the coarsely laid dinner-table, the men with arms bare to the elbows.

" I am sorry I come at lunch-time," said Syson.

"Hello, Addy!" said the farmer, assuming the old form of address, but his tone cold. "How are you?"

And he shook hands.

"Shall you have a bit?" he invited the young visitor, but taking for granted the offer would be refused. He assumed that Syson was become too refined to eat so roughly. The young man winced at the imputation.

"Have you had any dinner?" asked the daughter.

"No," replied Syson. "It is too early. I shall be back at half-past one."

"You call it lunch, don't you?" asked the eldest son, almost ironical. He had once been an intimate friend of this young man.

"We'll give Addy something when we've finished," said the mother, an invalid, deprecating.

"No—don't trouble. I don't want to give you any trouble," said Syson.

"You could allus live on fresh air an' scenery," laughed the youngest son, a lad of nineteen.

Syson went round the buildings, and into the orchard at the back of the house, where daffodils all along the hedgerow swung like yellow, ruffled birds on their perches. He loved the place extraordinarily, the hills ranging round, with bear-skin woods covering their giant shoulders, and small red farms like brooches clasping their garments; the blue streak of water in the valley, the bareness of the home pasture, the sound of myriad-threaded bird-singing, which went mostly unheard. To his last day, he would dream of this place, when he felt the sun on his face, or saw the small handfuls of snow between the winter twigs, or smelt the coming of spring.

Hilda was very womanly. In her presence he felt constrained. She was twenty-nine, as he was, but she seemed to him much older. He felt foolish, almost unreal, beside her. She was so static. As he was fingering some shed plum blossom on a low bough, she came to the back door to shake the tablecloth. Fowls raced from the stackyard, birds rustled from the trees. Her dark hair was gathered up in a coil like a crown on her head. She was very straight, distant in her bearing. As she folded the cloth, she looked away over the hills.

Presently Syson returned indoors. She had prepared eggs and curd cheese, stewed gooseberries and cream.

"Since you will dine tonight," she said, "I have only given you a light lunch."

"It is awfully nice," he said. "You keep a real idyllic atmosphere—your belt of straw and ivy buds."

Still they hurt each other.

He was uneasy before her. Her brief, sure speech, her distant

bearing, were unfamiliar to him. He admired again her grey-black eyebrows, and her lashes. Their eyes met. He saw, in the beautiful grey and black of her glance, tears and a strange light, and at the back of all, calm acceptance of herself, and triumph over him.

He felt himself shrinking. With an effort he kept up the ironic manner.

She sent him into the parlour while she washed the dishes. The long low room was refurnished from the Abbey sale, with chairs upholstered in claret-coloured rep, many years old, and an oval table of polished walnut, and another piano, handsome, though still antique. In spite of the strangeness, he was pleased. Opening a high cupboard let into thickness of the wall, he found it full of his books, his old lesson-books, and volumes of verse he had sent her, English and German. The daffodils in the white window-bottoms shone across the room, he could almost feel their rays. The old glamour caught him again. His youthful water-colours on the wall no longer made him grin; he remembered how fervently he had tried to paint for her, twelve years before.

She entered, wiping a dish, and he saw again the bright, kernel-white beauty of her arms.

"You are quite splendid here," he said, and their eyes met.

"Do you like it?" she asked. It was the old, low, husky tone of intimacy. He felt a quick change beginning in his blood. It was the old, delicious sublimation, the thinning, almost the vaporizing of himself, as if his spirit were to be liberated.

"Aye," he nodded, smiling at her like a boy again. She bowed her head.

"This was the countess's chair," she said in low tones. "I found her scissors down here between the padding."

"Did you? Where are they?"

Quickly, with a lilt in her movement, she fetched her work-basket, and together they examined the long-shanked old scissors.

"What a ballad of dead ladies!" he said, laughing, as he fitted his fingers into the round loops of the countess's scissors.

"I knew you could use them," she said, with certainty. He looked at his fingers, and at the scissors. She meant his fingers were fine enough for the small-looped scissors.

"That is something to be said for me," he laughed, putting the scissors aside. She turned to the window. He noticed the fine, fair down on her cheek and her upper lip, and her soft, white neck, like the throat of a nettle flower, and her fore-arms, bright as newly blanched kernels. He was looking at her with new eyes, and she was a different person to him. He did not know her. But he could regard her objectively now.

"Shall we go out awhile?" she asked.

"Yes!" he answered. But the predominant emotion, that troubled the excitement and perplexity of his heart, was fear, fear of that which he saw. There was about her the same manner, the same intonation in her voice, now as then, but she was not what he had known her to be. He knew quite well what she had been for him. And gradually he was realizing that she was something quite other, and always had been.

She put no covering on her head, merely took off her apron, saying, "We will go by the larches." As they passed the old orchard, she called him in to show him a blue-tit's nest in one of the apple trees, and a sycock's in the hedge. He rather wondered at her surety, at a certain hardness like arrogance hidden under her humility.

"Look at the apple buds," she said, and he then perceived myriads of little scarlet balls among the drooping boughs. Watching his face, her eyes went hard. She saw the scales were fallen from him, and at last he was going to see her as she was. It was the thing she had most dreaded in the past, and most needed, for her soul's sake. Now he was going to see her as she was. He would not love her, and he would know he never could have loved her. The old illusion gone, they were strangers, crude and entire. But he would give her her due—she would have her due from him.

She was brilliant as he had not known her. She showed him nests: a jenny wren's in a low bush.

"See this jinty's!" she exclaimed.

He was surprised to hear her use the local name. She reached carefully through the thorns, and put her finger in the nest's round door.

"Five!" she said. "Tiny little things."

She showed him nests of robins, and chaffinches, and linnets, and buntings; of a wagtail beside the water.

"And if we go down, nearer the lake, I will show you a kingfisher's . . ."

"Among the young fir trees," she said, "there's a throstle's or a blackie's on nearly every bough, every ledge. The first day, when I had seen them all, I felt as if I mustn't go in the wood. It seemed a city of birds: and in the morning, hearing them all, I thought of the noisy early markets. I was afraid to go in my own wood."

She was using the language they had both of them invented. Now it was all her own. He had done with it. She did not mind his silence, but was always dominant, letting him see her wood. As they came along a marshy path where forget-me-nots were opening in a rich blue drift: "We know all the birds, but there are many flowers we can't find out," she said. It was half an appeal to him, who had known the names of things.

She looked dreamily across to the open fields that slept in the sun.

"I have a lover as well, you know," she said, with assurance, yet dropping again almost into the intimate tone.

This woke in him the spirit to fight her.

"I think I met him. He is good-looking—also in Arcady."

Without answering, she turned into a dark path that led up-hill, where the trees and undergrowth were very thick.

"They did well," she said at length, "to have various altars to various gods, in old days."

"Ah yes!" he agreed. "To whom is the new one?"

"There are no old ones," she said. "I was always looking for this."

"And whose is it?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said, looking full at him.

"I'm very glad, for your sake," he said, "that you are satisfied."

"Aye—but the man doesn't matter so much," she said. There was a pause.

"No!" he exclaimed, astonished, yet recognizing her as her real self.

"It is one's self that matters," she said. "Whether one is being one's own self and serving one's own God."

There was silence, during which he pondered. The path was almost flowerless, gloomy. At the side, his heels sank into soft clay.

"I," she said, very slowly, "I was married the same night as you."

He looked at her.

"Not legally, of course," she replied. "But—actually."

"To the keeper?" he said, not knowing what else to say.

She turned to him.

"You thought I could not?" she said. But the flush was deep in her cheek and throat, for all her assurance.

Still he would not say anything.

"You see"—she was making an effort to explain—"*I* had to understand also."

"And what does it amount to, this understanding?" he asked.

"A very great deal—does it not to you?" she replied. "One is free."

"And you are not disappointed?"

"Far from it!" Her tone was deep and sincere.

"You love him?"

"Yes, I love him."

"Good!" he said.

This silenced her for a while.

"Here, among his things, I love him," she said.

His conceit would not let him be silent.

" It needs this setting ? " he asked.

" It does," she cried. " You were always making me to be not myself."

He laughed shortly.

" But is it a matter of surroundings ? " he said. He had considered her all spirit.

" I am like a plant," she replied. " I can only grow in my own soil."

They came to a place where the undergrowth shrank away, leaving a bare, brown space, pillared with the brick-red and purplish trunks of pine trees. On the fringe hung the sombre green of elder trees, with flat flowers in bud, and below were bright, unfurling pennons of fern. In the midst of the bare space stood a keeper's log hut. Pheasant-coops were lying about, some occupied by a clucking hen, some empty.

Hilda walked over the brown pine-needles to the hut, took a key from among the eaves, and opened the door. It was a bare wooden place with a carpenter's bench and form, carpenter's tools, an axe, snares, traps, some skins pegged down, everything in order. Hilda closed the door. Syson examined the weird flat coats of wild animals, that were pegged down to be cured. She turned some knotch in the side wall, and disclosed a second, small apartment.

" How romantic ! " said Syson.

" Yes. He is very curious—he has some of a wild animal's cunning—in a nice sense—and he is inventive, and thoughtful—but not beyond a certain point."

She pulled back a dark green curtain. The apartment was occupied almost entirely by a large couch of heather and bracken, on which was spread an ample rabbit-skin rug. On the floor were patchwork rugs of cat-skin, and a red calf-skin, while hanging from the wall were other furs. Hilda took down one, which she put on. It was a cloak of rabbit-skin and of white fur, with a hood, apparently of the skins of stoats. She laughed at Syson from out of this barbaric mantle, saying :

" What do you think of it ? "

" Ah— ! I congratulate you on your man," he replied.

" And look ! " she said.

In a little jar on a shelf were some sprays, frail and white, of the first honeysuckle.

" They will scent the place at night," she said.

He looked round curiously.

" Where does he come short, then ? " he asked. She gazed at him for a few moments. Then, turning aside :

" The stars aren't the same with him," she said. " You could make them flash and quiver, and the forget-me-nots come up at

me like phosphorescence. You could make things *wonderful.* I have found it out—it is true. But I have them all for myself, now."

He laughed, saying :

" After all, stars and forget-me-nots are only luxuries. You ought to make poetry."

" Aye," she assented. " But I have them all now."

Again he laughed bitterly at her.

She turned swiftly. He was leaning against the small window of the tiny, obscure room, and was watching her, who stood in the doorway, still cloaked in her mantle. His cap was removed, so she saw his face and head distinctly in the dim room. His black, straight, glossy hair was brushed clean back from his brow. His black eyes were watching her, and his face, that was clear and cream, and perfectly smooth, was flickering.

" We are very different," she said bitterly.

Again he laughed.

" I see you disapprove of me," he said.

" I disapprove of what you have become," she said.

" You think we might "—he glanced at the hut—" have been like this—you and I ? "

She shook her head.

" You ! No ; never ! You plucked a thing and looked at it till you had found out all you wanted to know about it, then you threw it away," she said.

" Did I ? " he asked. " And could your way never have been my way ? I suppose not."

" Why should it ? " she said. " I am a separate being."

" But surely two people sometimes go the same way," he said.

" You took me away from myself," she said.

He knew he had mistaken her, had taken her for something she was not. That was his fault, not hers.

" And did you always know ? " he asked.

" No—you never let me know. You bullied me. I couldn't help myself. I was glad when you left me, really."

" I know you were," he said. But his face went paler, almost deathly luminous.

" Yet," he said, " it was you who sent me the way I have gone."

" I ! " she exclaimed, in pride.

" You would have me take the Grammar School scholarship—and you would have me foster poor little Botell's fervent attachment to me, till he couldn't live without me—and because Botell was rich and influential. You triumphed in the wine-merchant's offer to send me to Cambridge, to befriend his only child. You wanted me to rise in the world. And all the time you were sending me away from you—every new success of mine put a separation between us,

and more for you than for me. You never wanted to come with me: you wanted just to send me to see what it was like. I believe you even wanted me to marry a lady. You wanted to triumph over society in me."

"And I am responsible," she said, with sarcasm.

"I distinguished myself to satisfy you," he replied.

"Ah!" she cried, "you always wanted change, change, like a child."

"Very well! And I am a success, and I know it, and I do some good work. But—I thought you were different. What right have you to a man?"

"What do you want?" she said, looking at him with wide, fearful eyes.

He looked back at her, his eyes pointed, like weapons.

"Why, nothing," he laughed shortly.

There was a rattling at the outer latch, and the keeper entered. The woman glanced round, but remained standing, fur-cloaked, in the inner doorway. Syson did not move.

The other man entered, saw, and turned away without speaking. The two also were silent.

Pilbeam attended to his skins.

"I must go," said Syson.

"Yes," she replied.

"Then I give you 'To our vast and varying fortunes.'" He lifted his hand in pledge.

"'To our vast and varying fortunes,'" she answered gravely, and speaking in cold tones.

"'Arthur!" she said.

The keeper pretended not to hear. Syson, watching keenly, began to smile. The woman drew herself up.

"Arthur!" she said again, with a curious upward inflection, which warned the two men that her soul was trembling on a dangerous crisis.

The keeper slowly put down his tool and came to her.

"Yes," he said.

"I wanted to introduce you," she said, trembling.

"I've met him a'ready," said the keeper.

"Have you? It is Addy, Mr. Syson, whom you know about—This is Arthur, Mr. Pilbeam," she added, turning to Syson. The latter held out his hand to the keeper, and they shook hands in silence.

"I'm glad to have met you," said Syson. "We drop our correspondence, Hilda?"

"Why need we?" she asked.

The two men stood at a loss.

"*Is* there no need?" said Syson.

Still she was silent.

"It is as you will," she said.

They went all three together down the gloomy path.

"'*Qu'il était bleu, le ciel, et grand l'espoir*,'" quoted Syson, not knowing what to say.

"What do you mean?" she said. "Besides, *we* can't walk in *our* wild oats—we never sowed any."

Syson looked at her. He was startled to see his young love, his nun, his Botticelli angel, so revealed. It was he who had been the fool. He and she were more separate than any two strangers could be.

She only wanted to keep up a correspondence with him—and he, of course, wanted it kept up, so that he could write to her, like Dante to some Beatrice who had never existed save in the man's own brain.

At the bottom of the path she left him. He went along with the keeper, towards the open, towards the gate that closed on the wood. The two men walked almost like friends. They did not broach the subject of their thoughts.

Instead of going straight to the high-road gate, Syson went along the wood's edge, where the brook spread out in a little bog, and under the elder trees, among the reeds, great yellow stools and bosses of marigolds shone. Threads of brown water trickled by, touched with gold from the flowers. Suddenly there was a blue flash in the air, as a kingfisher passed.

Syson was extraordinarily moved. He climbed the bank to the gorse bushes, whose sparks of blossom had not yet gathered into a flame.

Lying on the dry brown turf, he discovered sprigs of tiny purple milkwort and pink spots of lousewort. What a wonderful world it was—marvellous, for ever new. He felt as if it were underground, like the fields of monotone hell, notwithstanding. Inside his breast was a pain like a wound. He remembered the poem of William Morris, where in the Chapel of Lyonesse a knight lay wounded, with the truncheon of a spear deep in his breast, lying always as dead, yet did not die, while day after day the coloured sunlight dipped from the painted window across the chancel, and passed away. He knew now it never had been true, that which was between him and her, not for a moment. The truth had stood apart all the time.

Syson turned over. The air was full of the sound of larks, as if the sunshine above were condensing and falling in a shower. Amid this bright sound, voices sounded small and distinct.

" But if he's married, an' quite willing to drop it off, what has ter against it ? " said the man's voice.

" I don't want to talk about it now. I want to be alone."

Syson looked through the bushes. Hilda was standing in the wood, near the gate. The man was in the field, loitering by the hedge, and playing with the bees as they settled on the white bramble flowers.

There was silence for a while, in which Syson imagined her will among the brightness of the larks.

Suddenly the keeper exclaimed "Ah ! " and swore. He was gripping at the sleeve of his coat, near the shoulder. Then he pulled off his jacket, threw it on the ground, and absorbedly rolled up his shirt-sleeve right to the shoulder.

" Ah ! " he said vindictively, as he picked out the bee and flung it away. He twisted his fine, bright arm, peering awkwardly over his shoulder.

" What is it ? " asked Hilda.

" A bee—crawled up my sleeve," he answered.

" Come here to me," she said.

The keeper went to her, like a sulky boy. She took his arm in her hands.

" Here it is—and the sting left in—poor bee ! "

She picked out the sting, put her mouth to his arm, and sucked away the drop of poison. As she looked at the red mark her mouth had made, and at his arm, she said, laughing :

" That is the reddest kiss you will ever have."

When Syson next looked up, at the sound of voices, he saw in the shadow the keeper with his mouth on the throat of his beloved, whose head was thrown back, and whose hair had fallen, so that one rough rope of dark brown hair hung across his bare arm.

" No," the woman answered. " I am not upset because he's gone. You won't understand . . ."

Syson could not distinguish what the man said. Hilda replied, clear and distinct :

" You know I love you. He has gone quite out of my life—don't trouble about him . . ." He kissed her, murmuring. She laughed hollowly.

" Yes," she said, indulgent. " We will be married, we will be married. But not just yet."

He spoke to her again. Syson heard nothing for a time. Then she said :

" You must go home, now, dear—you will get no sleep."

Again was heard the murmur of the keeper's voice, troubled by fear and passion.

" But why should we be married at once ? " she said. " What

more would you have, by being married? It is most beautiful as it is."

At last he pulled on his coat and departed. She stood at the gate, not watching him, but looking over the sunny country.

When at last she had gone, Syson also departed, going back to town.

* * *

ANSWERS to WANDERLUST on page 64

1. *Icarus flew too near the sun on wings fastened with wax. When the wax melted in the heat he fell into the sea later called Icarian. The story is told in Ovid's "Metamorphoses."*
2. *In "The Pardoner's Tale," one of "The Canterbury Tales" by Geoffrey Chaucer, the Pardoner tells of an old, old man who was doomed to go on living against his will.*
3. *Herman Watzinger, as described in "The Kon-tiki Expedition," by Thor Heyerdahl, crossed the Pacific on a raft to support a theory that the South Sea Islands were peopled from Peru.*
4. *In "The Winter's Tale" by William Shakespeare, Perdita sailed with her lover, Prince Florizel, from Bohemia to Sicily.*
5. *Nanki-Poo, in the comic opera, "The Mikado," disguised himself as a wandering minstrel to avoid marrying Katisha, and married the lovely Yum-yum. The libretto is by W. S. Gilbert.*
6. *Fitzroy Maclean, in "Eastern Approaches," tells how he arrested the Persian General Zahidi, in league with German agents.*
7. *The author, in "Rural Rides," by William Cobbett. He criticised the enclosed "new" farms of his day.*
8. *Great-heart, who guided Christiana and her children to the Celestial City, in John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress."*
9. *Professor Challenger, the leader of the band of explorers in Sir A. Conan Doyle's "The Lost World."*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, Sequence. 5, Embalm. 9, Boat race. 10, Unwell. 12, Extirpate. 14, Irons. 15, Arc. 16, Carver. 19, Addle. 22, Patna. 23, Sheath. 25, Tit. 28, Cairo. 29, Road house. 32, Raisin. 33, Stock-pot. 34, Lights. 35, Prisoner.

Down. 1, Sublet. 2, Quartz. 3, Error. 4, Cocoa. 6, Mendicant. 7, Adenoids. 8, Molasses. 11, Hearse. 13, Par. 17, Anatomist. 18, Vestry. 20, Spectral. 21, Striving. 24, Aid. 26, Turpin. 27, Pewter. 30, Attar. 31, Hocus.

ESCAPE

Already, deep down in the black heart of him, he was afraid

by KEITH HORAN

HE wiped the sweat out of his eyes and lay for a moment quiescent, striving desperately to still the beating of his heart, and the harsh dry sobs of his breathing. His face was smarting, for the barbs of the thorn-bush, under which he had dived for shelter after the last desperate dash across the open to the sanctuary of the forest, had slashed him cruelly. Presently he recovered somewhat; relieved, at least temporarily, of that ghastly suspense that only an escaping prisoner knows. The agony of mind when preparing to make the attempt; waiting for the precise second, refusing it, missing it: condemning himself for losing an opportunity and so preparing all over again in an anguish of uncertainty and expectation. He sat up and looked back. There was no sign of pursuit.

In the light of early morning he found he could see things with an uncanny, stereoscopic clarity. From the slight eminence of his position he could make out the white, wooden house of the Director framed by its brilliant gardens of bougainvillæa, cassias and flame-of-the-woods.

Behind it were the dormitories and, farther to the left, the long, narrow rows of punishment cells, lit only by a tiny opening over each entrance. Isolated in a small courtyard were the three condemned cells, one of which he had just left, and the little wooden shed that housed the guillotine.

As his gaze fell on that his lips drew back in a vicious, animal snarl. So that was to have been his destiny? The fools! The canaille! Who did they take him for? He, *Le Loup*; ex-leader of as successful and ruthless a band of gangsters and murderers as Paris had ever known.

He stood up, a tall yet incongruous figure in the striped pink and white pyjamas of the convict. Sweeping off his round straw hat in a gesture of old-world courtesy, he bowed low in the direction of the house of death.

"Madame," he said, mockingly, "I regret I am so ungallant as not to court your embrace. It may be that, one day, your passion will be satisfied and you will bring me to your bed, but until then—"

he shrugged significantly, " —you must cool your ardour, and before then many, I think, will die."

He looked away to the north and east where the sea was frothing soft, silky patterns on the hot sands, and grinned sardónically. There was no escape that way. The sharks would see to that. They were the best gaolers the prison authorities possessed. No. It had to be the jungle route. Due south first, to avoid pursuit, and then west to the wide river that marked the frontier. Once over that he would be amongst friends, for he had laid his plans carefully.

He turned without a backward glance and the green dimness of the jungle lured him with a fascination that appealed and yet awed. Awed because, for all his fierce strength and ruthless courage, he knew himself for a townsman born and bred, about to pit his strength and wits against a force he did not understand and, deep down in the black heart of him, he was afraid.

But his plan was simple and crystal-clear in his mind. He would climb the forest-clad mountains that lay ahead of him and which formed the watershed of several small streams flowing west. One of these he would follow, down to its junction with the frontier river that was his goal.

At first the going was easy, with the trees widely spaced and little or no undergrowth. The great trunks were of many different colours and textures. Some smooth and marbled white ; some scaly and red, like a Scots pine ; others grey-green and ghostly like the phantom forests of a Disney film. But all reared up for a hundred feet or so before swelling out into a solid pall of green that almost obscured the sky. It seemed to the fugitive as if he were moving up a grassy aisle in some vast cathedral and he realized, with something of a shock, that he was walking on tip-toe and whispering to himself.

Presently the trees began to close in and undergrowth and creepers hid and festooned the bases of the trunks. But the way was still clear, the air was heavy with the fragrance of exotic flowers and the sun, filtering down through the leaves, turned the brown leaf-mould on which he trod into a soft, warm carpet of gold.

As a spider's web, spangled with drops of silver dew, becomes an invitation and a delight to some wandering fly and hides the menace that, patient and watchful, lurks within, so did the jungle still beckon kindly to her guest.

He found himself stopping frequently and holding his breath to listen. He had imagined himself alone in a dead world, silent and lifeless, but now he was conscious of many voices. Some he could recognize. The maddening screech of the cicadas, the sound that, alone and unaided will turn a lost person into a raving lunatic ; the soft cooing of a dove or the sharp, masterful call of a jungle cock.

These were easy and understandable, but now other sounds, every one of which held a vague menace, forced themselves into his unwilling consciousness. A sudden hysterical chatter from the branches high overhead ; the scream of some tiny animal in its death throes ; stealthy mysterious rustlings close at hand that set his heart pounding at his side.

At the same time he got the first inkling that he was being watched. He could see nothing, but he knew. He knew, with the clarity of a spot-light, that something—many things—were watching ; waiting for him to panic and weaken.

The path grew steeper ; then lost itself and disappeared. Instead of treading sunlit clearings and wide, green-cloistered avenues he had to force his way through clinging thorn and creeper that spread spike and tendril to hamper and delay him, clawing at his flesh and clothing with a blind persistence that was almost human. Even the tall grasses bent over to reach him, brushing his face with their feathered heads, breathing his fate in their muffled whispers, clutching, gripping, with their soft and cloying hands.

Hacking at the undergrowth with his knife ; torn, bleeding and consumed with thirst ; fighting down the panic that welled up within him and the nightmare sensation of making no progress whatever, he still struggled on, utterly unconscious of the passage of the hours. Only the fierceness of his desire for freedom and the raging passion of his nature forced him on, almost beyond the limit of human endurance.

He came upon a jungle pool, full of black, stagnant water, from which venomous-looking plants emerged, and swollen fungi clustered in cancerous lumps upon the rotting logs at its verge. Flinging himself down and using his hands as a ladle he had swallowed two or three mouthfuls before he realized the virulent danger of the noxious liquid, which was already causing him to feel deathly sick. He sat back panting and exhausted and noticed for the first time that blood was oozing from his sandals. He took them off and cut away the swollen leeches that had attacked him. Happening to glance upwards he saw there were dozens—hundreds—of those ghastly blind worms, humping and looping along the branches, guided only by the scent of flesh and the prospect of blood.

The sight of them brought the full horror of his situation clearly into focus. Something of the enormity of the struggle for existence in those shimmering dark forests entered into his consciousness ; a struggle that had to proceed quietly lest the hunter himself became the hunted. He began to realize how, night and day, creation devours itself under the high roof of the listless leaves : how the most harmless-looking insect has the most deadly sting, the most beautiful flower carries its secret burden of poison. And he realized,

too, that every horn and hoof, beak and tooth is against every other horn and hoof and beak and tooth, and that the pulse-beat of existence is accompanied by the crunching of bones and the tearing of soft, warm flesh.

He cried aloud in his anguish and terror and, jumping to his feet, forced himself to continue his climb. The sun dipped towards the horizon and the shadows grew longer.

And then the spiders came.

He was resting for a moment in a tiny clearing when, in the dark shade of a great tree, something stirred. Then, into full daylight, something sidled—squat, hairy, evil. There were two of them—at first; two bloated, obscene, yellow splodges with bodies the size of a man's fist and long, hairy, legs that rattled as they moved. They squatted in the clearing, glaring at him with malevolent bulbous eyes, their front legs slightly raised and quivering like monstrous antennæ.

Suddenly, with the speed of light, one of them sprang and fastened on to his bare ankle above the leather thong of his sandal. He screamed and slashed at it with his knife, knocking it, broken and mutilated, into the undergrowth where it was instantly set upon and devoured by its mate and two other spiders that appeared from nowhere. All the time they made their filthy meal they watched him, their eyes glittering and their mouths cavernous and black.

A great blister came up where the spider had bitten him, causing him acute pain; but whenever he moved to rub the spot the three brutes stopped eating and squatted, crouched and tense, staring at him with a hellish intensity that was magnified a hundredfold by their complete immobility.

And so he stood, frozen with horror and utterly unable to stir hand or foot, and the minutes passed. Some clouds drifted across the sun as it sank below the horizon; there was a fleeting moment of twilight, and then it was dark. Jungle and open space alike vanished. He might have been floating, a disembodied spirit, in the Stygian blackness of outer space for all the knowledge with which his eyes could furnish him. But his ears and his brain still functioned. He could hear the rustling in the leaves and the clicker of their legs as the spiders circled him and his tortured mind conceived a death that made him pray aloud for unconsciousness.

Uncounted æons passed and he became aware of a change. The vault of sky had lost its inky darkness and a light, opaque and unearthly, was spreading out from the unseen horizon like a silent tide. The boughs and boles of the trees began to resume their shapes and the topmost leaves to glisten and sparkle like precious gems.

He heard a fresh rustling in the bushes behind him and had half

turned to meet the danger when, from the branches above him, something sprang. He caught a momentary glimpse of a monstrous, shape, black against the faint light, dropping out of the tree, and then a furry body landed with a squelch on his shoulder and a long, hairy leg reached for his mouth.

One ghastly, quivering scream rang through the jungles and then there was silence.

The Moon Goddess swam into view over the tree-tops, radiant in the glory of her golden panoply: "hunting the clouds" and wrapping the figure that lay so still at the foot of the tree in a shroud of soft, silver light.

From far overhead the pretty little capuchin monkey looked down. He was still shaking with terror, for he was not accustomed to tree-stumps that screamed and clutched him when he landed on them.

Then, monkey-like, he forgot all about it and swung away through the branches to find fresh interests.

Once again the jungles fell silent. Only the keenest listener would have heard the lisping notes of the little stream that, not a hundred yards away, sang happily to itself as it gurgled and chuckled over its stony bed on its way to join the big river.

* * *

. . . AND SO TO BED

Aryse erly,
serve god devowtely
and the worlde besely,
doo thy work wisely
geve thyne almes secretely,
goo by the waye sadly,
answer the people demuerly,
goo to thy mete apetitely,
sit thereat discretely,
and of thy tunge be not to liberally,
arise therfrom temperally,
go to thy supper soberly,
and to thy bed merely,
be in thyne Inn jocundely,
please thy love duely,
and slepe suerly.

Author Unknown

Kettle of Fish

THE Sea-Serpent is from 18 to 200 feet, at an average 100 feet long. It has a comparatively small head, which, however, is somewhat broader than the neck ; this increases in size towards the trunk . . .

Its long muscular tail is somewhat thinner than the trunk and tapering to the end. Its head resembles that of the sea-lion . . . Two brilliant, light-reflecting eyes. On the neck there is a long mane like that of a horse, but coarser . . .

Ears are never mentioned.

DR. A. C. OUDEMAN, *The Great Sea-Serpent*, 1892

How many Scientists have written
The shark is gentle as a kitten !
Yet this I know about the shark :
His bite is worser than his bark.

OGDEN NASH

Who can show a pedigree like Leviathan ? Ahab's harpoon had shed older blood than the Pharaohs. Methuselah seems a school-boy. I look round to shake hands with Shem. I am horror-struck at this antemosaic, unsourced existence of the unspeakable terrors of the whale, which, having been before all time, must need exist after all humane ages are over.

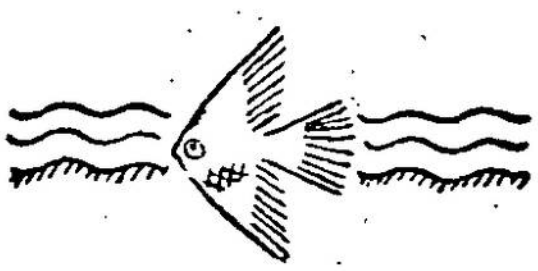
HERMAN MELVILLE

Ann ! Ann !
Come ! quick as you can !
There's a fish that talks
In the frying pan . . .

WALTER DE LA MARE

" The sea ! " cried the miller . . . " There are great fish in it five times bigger than a bull, and one old serpent as long as our river and as old as all the world, with whiskers like a man, and a crown of silver on her head."

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



★*Who is IRON CHEST, diamond thief feared throughout Europe? Raiding a jeweller's shop at Tangier he escaped from SIR HENRY MERRIVALE, world-famous amateur detective, and COLONEL DUROC, head of the city's international police force. BILL BENTLEY, of the British Consulate, and his wife, PAULA, almost captured him. Next morning Paula, seeing diamonds and the famous iron chest, carried by the criminal to the scenes of his crimes, at a flat advertised to let, entered with COMMANDANT JUAN ALVAREZ, Duroc's right-hand man. Duroc followed, then MAUREEN HOLMES, Sir Henry's secretary. G. W. COLLIER, tenant of the flat, sneered while police searched without result, and afterwards disappeared. Later, in the Little Socco, Sir Henry explained to Alvarez and Maureen that Collier was an accomplice of Iron Chest, who had let him try the Tangier raid. They were joined by ILONE, COUNTESS SCHERBATSKY, and MARK HAMMOND, American writer. Collier suddenly appeared but escaped again.*

That night Paula, Bill, Alvarez and Sir Henry ran Collier to earth at the premises of Ali the carpet dealer. He shot and injured Alvarez and Bill knocked him out in a boxing match. While Ali's wife pleaded for her husband, in league with Iron Chest, Collier seemed about to escape.

The Last Part of

BEHIND THE CRIMSON BLIND

by CARTER DICKSON

COLLIER had become conscious again quicker than they thought. Though still dizzy, he was firm on his legs and arms. Surreptitiously he had drawn down his coat and shirt from the sideboard, and put them on. With labour he had crawled below the line of the carpets to the proper place beneath that window.

And then, as though by a blast of magic, they saw him standing on the window sill. His left hand clutched a concealed rod up the side of the window under the robes, and with the right hand he was frantically twisting the rusty brass handle of the window to open it.

" Commandant, there is only one thing to be done," demanded Perez.

"Yes!"

While Collier stood like an immense white slug against the crimson panes, frantically working at the catch, the Acting Commandant swept his hand backwards, upwards and outwards, towards the left-hand wall behind him. "Garcia!" he shouted.

In the wall a half-hidden square spy hole swung open on hinges.

Tat-tat-tattattat, began the chatter of an automatic rifle, quivering as it ripped bullets across the room.

"Down!" yelled Perez. "Down on your faces, everybody, down!"

Paula went down immediately. So did the Arab girl. Even Sir Henry Merrivale once more suffered insult as he flopped forwards on his stomach. But Bill, who was anyway outside the line of fire, merely sat there with shoulders hung forward. Alvarez, on his elbow, and Perez squatting, saw with sick despair that the angle of fire was too wide. Garcia could not twist it back.

The bullets smashed down in a vertical line on the stone just at the right of the window, puffing out a cloud of plaster dust but breaking only one pane of the window. Collier swung round his bloodstained face, sneered at them, and began to swing back.

Again Perez's hand went out and up, towards the right-hand side of the wall behind him. Another spy hole flashed open.

Tat-tat-tattattattat, clattered the second automatic rifle, in the fury of its ten-cartridge clip. Perez shouted out. At last they had a proper angle, ripping straight to Collier's right side. The impact of the first bullet nearly knocked him from the window. His right hand reached up and gripped the rod above the window, leaving the handle to his left.. The robes swung, the sheathed dagger swayed. But the imitation white-gold and brass-studded scimitar sheath, swinging wildly, banged against the window and flew backwards into the room, landing on the carpet.

Collier's very clothes seemed to flap and fly in the wind of bullets, not to mention what seeped out from them. The last of the bullets came within an inch of Bill's head.

But Collier had now wrenched open the handle with his left hand, kicking the window wide. Up went Perez's hand, above his head, while he shouted another unintelligible name.

Tat-tat-tattattat, spurted out the rattle of the third automatic rifle, joined again by the first with a fresh clip. The Moorish hammer seemed to jump out from the rail, and by blind chance landed across the scimitar scabbard. To the staring eyes of Alvarez, a gleaming pattern of hammer and sickle appeared on the carpet.

Tat-tat-tattattat . . . Two lines of fire converged to the right of Collier's back. In dying agony, Collier gave a terrific spring backward from the window sill. He landed heavily, face-up, on the carpet. His blood flowed out and over the hammer-and-sickle design as he twitched once and forever lay still.

THE morning air, heavy and sunny, lay as bland as Parisian air over Tangier.

"You mean, Sir Henry, that there will be something *worse?*"

" Oh, my wench, much worse. Unless I'm wrong, the biggest blow-up is going to come tonight. See how frank I am ? "

" Then there's a catch in it," declared Maureen Holmes. " Please, what could possibly happen, with Collier dead and nothing important in his papers about him or even Iron Chest ? "

" Aren't you forgetting," said H.M., speaking carefully, " the person called Iron Chest ? "

Abruptly he craned round to look through the large plate glass and make sure that his sedan chair with the bearers remained safely inside. In the street they had caught the curiosity of so large and fascinated a crowd that a tactful policeman suggested the change.

H.M., to tell the truth, had no idea where he was. He knew he sat at an iron table, under the awning of a *terrasse*, in a spacious, pleasant square which might have resembled a square in a large French provincial city if most of the buildings had not been white or dun-coloured instead of grey. Three tree-lined streets swept down into it ; three more swept out of it. Towards H.M.'s right and across the street some self-important building squatted in cool complacence behind a clipped lawn with an outer fringe of trees.

H.M., however, knew only that he was sitting at the little round table, with three cups of black coffee. Across from him sat Maureen Holmes, in a violet frock and dark violet-coloured shoes. Her pale complexion drew colour from the sun, so that the green eyes and black hair had a new warmth. Across from her sat Paula, considering her a trifle overdressed ; Paula wore her usual white sleeveless silk frock, and bright sandals.

" Last night . . ." Paula began hesitantly.

" Paula, it must have been *horrible*," said Maureen, putting her hand gently on Paula's shoulder. " I couldn't have stood it, I know. All those bullets . . ."

" Oh, I didn't mind the bullets so much." Paula raised one eyebrow reflectively. " In fact, I rather liked them, though nothing could have induced me to look at Collier's body afterwards." She shuddered. " No, I meant the fight. With that horrible, gross, hairy red robot hitting Bill." Paula spoke with her usual candour. " When Bill threw a right cross and knocked Collier silly, I had hysterics and made a dreadful show of myself. I'm sure I can't think why."

" But it was only natural," protested Maureen. " How is Bill now?"

" Oh, not bad. He's at the hotel. He can move about, of course. But he did get a little punishment. He prefers to lie in bed and read *Zadig*." Paula yawned, the lids of her eyes drooping. " You know, it's a hot morning. I think I shall go back and turn in myself."

" Juan," said Maureen, regarding her clasped hands, " was rather wonderful too, wasn't he ? "

" Yes, dear. Silly-wonderful. Like both of them. And yet," said Paula thoughtfully, " that's how I should prefer them to be. How is Juan now ? "

Maureen consulted a wrist watch.

" In fifteen minutes more," she said, " I'm going out to the

nursing home to see Juan. Dr. MacPhail won't let me see him too often. He says it's bad chemistry."

"H'm," agreed Paula.

"And Juan isn't really hurt too badly," explained Maureen, "except that he didn't get attention soon enough for his chest wound. Dr. MacPhail puts all the blame on Sir Henry."

H.M.'s face turned the colour of a ripe egg-plant.

"That's fine," he addressed the square in general. "If anything goes right, it's luck. If anything goes wrong, it's me. Burn my aunt's britches, that's done it."

Both girls, conscience-stricken, turned towards him.

"Who's done all the work in this case, hey?" he demanded. Putting down his Churchillian bowler hat, he dramatically opened the side of his coat, showing an inside pocket bulging with papers.

"Y'know," he added, his mood changing, "at the end of this month there'll be a bill for cables, sent by me, that'll stagger even Duroc. Here's one I got yesterday—I forgot even to tell the Colonel. It's about the big girl from Madrid."

"What big girl from Madrid?" asked Paula.

"I'm telling you. There once was a . . . No, curse it, you'll have me on limericks again! But can't you remember evidence, when you hear it? There was a big, powerful woman who tried to grab the famous iron chest from the real, solid gold Iron Chest himself."

"Yes!" agreed Maureen, the contents of whose notebook remained in her head.

"Well, she didn't touch it. That was some time ago. When he was about to fire, she now says she wriggled her hips like some *danseuse*. Only, instead of wriggling 'em to the left, she wriggled 'em to the right and got a bullet there. The point is—she now swears, unconfirmed by Madrid police, she saw Iron Chest's face. He was bald and had a moustache."

"Bald? Moustache?" Maureen and Paula exclaimed together.

"And here's another cable," H.M. continued in his martyr's tone, "about a policeman who every month is getting a payment as much . . . Bah!" he snorted, stuffing back both cables. "What do I get for all my concentrated work, hey?"

"But, according to the notes I put down," protested Maureen, "Iron Chest always wore a hat. How could the Spanish woman tell he was bald?"

For answer H.M. clapped on the bowler, and leered. "Look, my wench. Couldn't you tell I hadn't got any fur on my onion?"

Paula's voice was so demure that H.M. saw no trap.

"By the way, they *did* capture that man Ali and his four accomplices?"

"They did, my dolly. Oh, excepting the one your husband knocked dead as a mackerel out of an orange tree. Y'see, I understand this Mendoubya business now. The Mendoubya, or whatever you want to call it, is the Arab court. If an Arab is nabbed, he's questioned by the ordinary Tangier police. But, if they've accumulated enough evidence against him, they're bound to hand him over to the

Mendoubya for trial. It is a just court, as that poor little Arab girl said last night. But its quality of mercy is strained pretty awful."

Here H.M.'s countenance assumed a stern, austere look, like that of an English judge considering the judicial procedure of other countries. "Y'see, my dolly, I'm awful afraid—in the near future, maybe—there's going to be hokey-pokey in this city."

"Dear Sir Henry," murmured Paula, putting her elbows on the table and gazing into his eyes. "Do tell me. Especially about the poor Arab girl."

H.M. shook his head darkly.

"Duroc says the Mendoubya is very anxious to interview an Arab crook they call the Father of Evil. Well! The Tangier police have spotted him, and they're ready to pounce. It wouldn't surprise me if Duroc made a little deal, an honest deal, though, with the head of the Mendoubya. In return for his handin' over the Father of Evil, they'd give Ali and company a light sentence. Of course that poor innocent girl would go free immediately, the only provision bein' that she never saw Ali again. D'ye follow me, my dolly?"

"Definitely," said Paula.

She exchanged glances with Maureen.

"Really, Sir Henry," burst out Maureen, with all her directness. "You said the stories about all these awful women were all a pack of lies! And at your age, too!"

"We-ell, after all," smiled the broad-minded Paula, "why not?"

"I dunno what you're talkin' about," stormed H.M., giving them a look of awed astonishment which would have deceived his own mother. "I'm a poor defenceless old man. They lead me about. I don't even know where I'm going, much less where I've been. Curse it, I don't even know where we are now!" He half stood up, craned his neck, and glared. "Where are we, anyway?"

"But this is the Place de France," said Paula.

"*The . . . what?*"

"Yes, didn't you know? That smug-looking building over there is the French Consulate."

A look of pure evil gleamed in the eyes of one who had been so saintly.

"This is the square," said H.M., "that nobody's ever able to cross, under any circumstances whatever?"

"Well . . . I never thought much about it, until you began going on last night. But it's true."

"Hem," said the great man, settling his hat and buttoning his coat. "Back in a moment."

WITH a look of great innocence, his corporation marching before him, he made his way out among the tables to stand on the edge of the terrain. No motor car, not even a bicycle, moved in the drowsiness and glittering tree-heat of the Place de France.

On the metal cleats of the pedestrian crossing at the Boulevard Pasteur, a traffic policeman drowsed with a whistle in his mouth. Two business men were arguing their way down the rue de Fez into the square. A haughty French nursemaid was pushing a perambulator

along the pavement past the consulate. H.M., considering, decided that the longest and best course was to walk obliquely across to the swing doors of the Cintra Bar far away.

"Hem," he repeated.

H.M. stepped out and began to cross the Place de France.

The traffic policeman, eyes flashing open, had the whistle in his mouth but stood petrified with the breath stuck in his throat. The haughty French maid, opening eyes of horror, let the pram get away from her and had to run for it. A slightly drunk law clerk, just emerging from the Cintra, put both hands over his eyes and bolted back inside.

Paula later declared that H.M. would have got fully halfway across—he was near it—if he had not been unintentionally betrayed by a waiter from their own café. The waiter came tearing out of the door with a tray of coffee cups and coffee glasses. He broke the spell by seeing the terrible sight and falling flat amid a crash of crockery and glass.

The noise of police whistles seemed to deaden the brain. Policemen, springing up out of nowhere—there seemed to be at least fifty of them—poured across the square and surrounded the culprit.

They shouted, blew their whistles, waved their arms, or did all three, amid a roar in three languages. H.M. was also seen to be waving his hands, bellowing back in English and French. It is a curious fact that the two business men, who had been descending the rue de Fez, turned and ran hard the other way. H.M. had now produced a dark blue object, and was pointing to its unmentionable photograph. The tumult subsided to dead silence, except for one deep, stately voice in French.

"Here veritably," it intoned, "we have the old goodman himself."

Every policeman stood back and saluted. A whistle blew. Immediately they formed two lines, with H.M. in the middle of the front rank like their officer, and marched him back to the café from which he had started. H.M., not at all displeased, gave a slight hem and turned round. He lifted his hand in salute.

Every man, palm outwards and together, saluted in reply.

"Well, now, thank'ee," said H.M., deeply gratified. "You boys like a drink?"

They would have filled the whole café. Smilingly declining because they were on duty, they melted away. H.M. sat down in his old chair, to a spatter of applause from nearby tables.

Paula, doubled up with joy, could not speak. Maureen was genuinely worried.

"What was it?" she asked.

"It was a swindle, like everything else." H.M. now spoke sourly. "No law of Charlemagne; no secret society; not one lightning bolt. But look there!"

He extended his hand, moving it slowly round in a circle.

"Rue Esperanza, Boulevard Pasteur," he said, "rue des . . . I forget than one, rue de Fez, rue de Belgique, rue du Statut. When the full tide of cars comes whistlin' down the up streets, and even

A pretty girl and her lover and a mysterious soldier of fortune suddenly caught up in a plot which threatens world peace!

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in next month's ARGOSY, on sale April 10th

jumps up from the down streets, to cross that square is the shortest way to the Pearly Gates. Cor, can't I believe it! Even for the drivers, I expect they've got to have a wrecking car and an ambulance standin' by. But why *now?* Burn it, there's not a car in sight. There's not . . ."

Down the rue de Belgique a pink Buick shot like a demented rocket, screeching at the slight turn as it plunged into the Boulevard Pasteur. The traffic policeman, by mere whim, had just elected to blow his whistle and extend his truncheon to stop traffic.

How the Buick did it, without knocking the policeman into a popcorn machine fifteen feet away, is a miracle known only to its makers. Its brakes screamed; they expected it almost to stand up on its haunches; but it stopped. Out of one window appeared the large hat and flowing moustachios of a very fat Italian.

"*Scusa,*" sighed the driver, in the liquid tongue of Dante.

The policeman, quite undisturbed, looked slowly and carefully out over a great square where not even a dog stirred. He blew his whistle, and signalled on the pink Buick, which instantly tore into top gear and shot like a rocket down the Boulevard Pasteur.

H.M. pounded his fist on the table.

"They're all crackers, I tell you!" he insisted. "I knew it before; now I can prove it. Why am I messing about with Charlemagne and thunderbolts when there's real work for me? For instance, now. Yesterday, in my noble costume, I was rowed out in the harbour . . ."

Maureen's curiosity had grown frantic.

"That's the second time I've heard you mention rowing out in the harbour," she protested. "What does it mean?"

"Ho," said H.M., and shut up one eye.

"He is without doubt," murmured Paula in a detached voice, "the most exasperating man I ever met. That Arab girl will poison him, Maureen; you mark my words." But Paula could not keep her detachment. "There's nothing in the harbour," she added, "except a very small cargo and passenger ship, the *Valencia*, I think. Bill and I saw it from the mint-tea tower the night before last. And the next boat from Gib isn't due until . . ."

"Stop a bit!" soothed H.M. "What you've got to understand . . ."

At this point a heavy, thick-bodied woman in shiny black, her face daubed with powder, mascara, and lipstick like fly paper, sat down

on the edge of H.M.'s chair and screamed deafeningly in his ear.

"Ha ha ha," coyly shrieked Ilone Scherbatsky. "You must be ze beeg droonkard! But you iss an Anglich lord and I vish to spik to you."

H.M. turned on her malignant spectacles.

"You are not ze R-r-ussian countess and burn me if I vish to spik to you. Now scram."

Ilone, who had always been treated with deep deference in the main because of her money, was astounded and infuriated. Today she wore a black hat bearing the figure of a large white dummy cockatoo, from whose red beak dangled a tiny bell. It tinkled with each wave of agitation.

"Mark," she gasped. "You get me a chair."

None had noticed her approach, or that of Hammond. Hammond, in a very conservative brown suit and brown hat, was not now surrounded by an aura of gin. His fastidious mouth looked grim.

"I greatly fear," he said, "that all the chairs are occupied."

"Then get me one from one of zees . . . zees—" Her contemptuous look swept round.

"One day, Ilone," said Hammond politely, "your reputation for good nature will vanish too, and then nobody will tolerate you."

But Ilone had heard nothing. Suddenly observing Paula and Maureen, she screamed again, threw out her arms, and pounced for both to give a lipsticky kiss.

"No, dear," said Paula in a dangerously gentle voice.

Ilone paused, bewildered. She did not know that the easy-going Paula, who had spoken only pleasant things of her, had heard from Bill through Colonel Duroc through H.M. of certain words in a tailor's shop yesterday.

Here Paula moved her arms and shoulders in a way which electrified several men on the pavement. Her imitation of Ilone was almost perfect.

"Ah, zis Bill!" cried Paula, with gestures. "He is Anglich. He is not *amoureux*. Ven 'e teach me ze pistol shoot, he do not visper pretty compliments to me; he do not touch me here, and here, and here."

"*Assez, assez!*" screamed Ilone, holding out one hand tragically. "I forgive you. Hélas! I forgive everybody. Zat is my veakness. I am a R-ru-us—" Here she stopped, remembered something, and looked at the glowering H.M. "He has called me vat I am not! I ask heem—vy?"

Hammond, trying to quieten her, gave Ilone an angry look. But both regarded H.M. in an odd way, as though they had some vague memory of having seen him somewhere before. They did not recognize that forgotten holy man, Hassan-el-Mulik.

"I am insult!" persisted Ilone. "Vy you say zat?"

"Ma'am," glared H.M., "your accent is so polyglot and generally messed up that it's hard to tell what you originally were. You interchange *v*'s and *w*'s in just the wrong places. No French person, in spite of all fiction, ever has or ever will say 'ze' or 'zat.' No, the

sound is like ' de ' or ' dat.' But the Teutonic peoples give you ' ze ' and ' zat.' So do lots of Russians. You might even be Russian, though I think you're from Hungary."

" I am ze Countess Scherbatsky, vife of ze Count Scherbatsky ! "

" Well, you may be," said H.M. " But in an awful dull novel, by an awful dull writer named Tolstoy—it's called *Anna Karenina*—there's a very aristocratic old gal named the ' Princess Shcherbatsky.' Maybe the author just invented her ; maybe your husband stuck his birth in a fine old line. Or maybe Mark Twain opened Burke's Peerage and found the Duke of Bilgewater. Like to make a little bet?"

Ilone, merely livid and speechless, did not even make a gesture.

" I knew it," whispered Paula. " I told Bill the title was a fake."

" For many years," Hammond remarked gloomily, " I have been wondering when somebody would spot that. Though I can't agree with your poor view of Tolstoy," he glanced at Ilone, " I'm afraid the lady is in one of her less malleable moods. Shall I get you a taxi, Ilone ? "

Ilone paid no attention.

" I moost g-know vat go on ! " she shrieked. " I must be *au fait —vous avez compris ?*—or I die. Yes, I die. Here ! I learn only zat Bill Bentley has knock out Collier in ze firs' round, and afterwards zey shoot Collier full of bullets." She thrust out her face towards H.M. " Now you tell me—vat else is zere to learn ? "

" Ma'am," said H.M., sticking his unmentionable face almost in her face, " I wouldn't tell you if you did die on the pavement. There's a very pleasin' spot just there," he added hopefully.

" No ? " shrieked Ilone, drawing up and back dramatically. " Zen I tell you vat *you* do not know ! Yes ! It is a rumour which run ze streets of all Tangier. Iron Chest, zis criminal, is in fact a vooman ! "

" What on earth . . ." began Maureen, her green eyes wide open. But Paula, her good humour restored, merely giggled.

" A *vooman !* " yelled Ilone—and made her great dramatic gesture.

Leaping sideways into the road, flinging up her arm like the Statue of Liberty, and shouting, " Taxi," Ilone was nearly murdered by a Citroen taxi which sprang straight at her and all but ran her down. At the same moment they heard the rattling and grinding of a jeep dashing full speed down the rue de Belgique ; they watched it crash into a turn.

Ilone leaped into the cab. Only by inches did the jeep avoid smashing against the back of the Citroen, which shot off down the rue du Statut. Still there was a general impression that the jeep meant to proceed straight into the café, except that its magnificent reeling turn brought it up full sideways to the kerb. Hammond walked away in another direction, seeking gin.

Out of the jeep, with strutting majesty and the driver behind him, stepped Colonel Duroc.

He did not speak, though his eye indicated that he might have everybody present hanged at any moment. Strutting over to the table of Sir Henry Merrivale, he murmured into H.M.'s ear.

" Enough ! " he said. " Now we will have the lunch and make the conference. You whisper. You hint. You shake. But this night, I ask, what is to happen ? "

H.M. suddenly drew down the Colonel's head so that nobody heard his whisper in reply.

" Maybe not much," he said. " But Iron Chest, the real Iron Chest in person, will try to crack Bernstein and Company tonight."

At this point, both Paula and Maureen made their excuses to leave. H.M. and the Colonel adjourned to the restaurant Ciro, in the rue Raphael nearby, for a lunch which lasted over four hours.

AND the shadows lengthened down from the Old Mountain, and presently became greyish-blue even in the winking lamps of Tangier.

H.M., at his lunch conference, had outlined to the Colonel exactly one-half—no more—of the plan he had in mind. Determined to be the Old Maestro if it choked him, he meant to execute the remainder himself. Only two questions, repeated endlessly, hammered on at the argument.

" Then you will swear this is to happen ? " inquired Duroc, tapping the table.

" No, no, no ! Nobody can do that. It may be tonight, or tomorrow, or a week after Whitsun. All I'm doing is gamblin' on Iron Chest's character for tonight. What's bothering you ? "

Duroc, his tufted eyebrows drawn down over blue penetrating eyes, looked suspicious.

" I tell you in frankness," he said, " I fear the hoke-poke."

" What d'y mean, the . . . Oh, I see." H.M. scowled. " Y'know, Colonel you honestly do speak very good English."

" *Un petit peu, peut-être,*" replied the well-gratified Colonel, turning out his wrist in a deprecating way. " I have been much with the British Army as with the Belgian. The best I know of English is too indecent to speak. But also I read your great poets, Ben Shakespeare and the rest."

" What I mean," persisted the purist H.M., " is that just lately you've been using some awful English phrases ; and curse me," he added, completely baffled, " if I can tell where you got 'em."

" *You* do not know, by burn ? " asked the astounded Colonel. " Well, no matter then.. But I repeat, you keep too much from me. I ask myself : do you wish to do me in the eye, Cain and Abel ? "

" Look here," said H.M. " When you and your crowd raided a certain place in the block of flats at 40-bis Marshan last night, did you get a hatful of diamonds or not ? You did ! Did your coppers shoot Collier as dead as a doornail ? They did ! And "—H.M. reached for a handful of newspapers from the nearest table—" are they whoopin' you up as a detective like Lecoq and Arsène Lupin rolled into one ? Honest, now, would I do you in the eye ? "

" We-el," deprecated the other, his chest swelling nevertheless. " Come ! When you tell me of the vanish tricks, and I myself deduce who is the real criminal . . . Stop ! Enough. We try your scheme."

Thus they had left the restaurant, Colonel Duroc in his jeep to set the wires humming, H.M. (strangely) on foot for another mysterious errand into the Kasbah and elsewhere. So the shadows gathered, strengthening, down from the Old Mountain, turning to greyish-blue and then to purplish-black.

The electric lamps of the New Town grew harder and brighter against it; the lamps of the Old Town, from electric to tallow, crept out and up their snaky hill. The Little Socco woke up and spiritually began to dance.

But it was not until a little past ten o'clock—they had allowed a later hour for the appearance of Iron Chest—that Sir Henry Merrivale lumbered down the rue du Statut from the Place de France.

Though H.M. had no nerves to speak of, he was playing a dangerous game and he knew it. Once or twice he growled to himself. He passed the middle slope of the descending street, all white fronts with separated gilded letters, with the Minzah Hotel now on his right and the premises of Messrs. Cook on his left.

He did not alter his step, on the left-hand pavement, until he neared the scene of their first adventure. The directions being reversed, the rue du Midi lay to the left with the bank at the corner; on his right the steps and incline down into the rue Waller. At the corner was the one dim street lamp, intensifying shadow beyond.

At a curious waddle he crossed the rue du Midi, sensing two skulkers in a doorway on the other side. At his left, beyond two doors, he saw the now very dark alley at the side of Bernstein et Cie. Across the two glass-fronted windows of the jeweller's, the folding steel network was closed and heavily locked, as H.M. discovered by twisting the lock.

He drifted only a few feet farther on, glancing into the black dusty window across which ran the enamelled letters, "Luisa Bonomi: Masks and Costumes," in two languages.

Pure grotesqueness looked him in the face, and ran through his mind. Seen closely, a half-circle of masks swung across the inside of the window. They were of papier-mâché or rubber, painted or unpainted, all with blank eyes or sometimes gaping mouths. Long curls of hair hung between them.

Putting out his hand, making sure the door was locked as it should be, H.M. turned and took a few steps back towards the jeweller's. He was a dim shape in his black alpaca suit and bowler. Another dark shape in civilian clothes, squat and thick, loomed up beside him.

"I have you, then, old joker," familiarly chuckled Acting Commandant Perez in French. "S-sst, all goes well?"

"All goes well, my assassin," agreed H.M.

"Now tell me," whispered Perez, nodding across the street, "is he in truth a man of yours, as he says?"

Lounging against the wall on a sort of cat-walk pavement past the wall of a closed shop, there stood a lean, wild figure possibly intended to represent a Spaniard. In his hands, with long powerful fingers, he held a guitar. He wore an immense flopping hat, and

tight-fitting red trousers with pearl buttons encased the long legs.

"He is silent now," continued Perez. "But for half an hour and more he screeches hideously at singing, and he is the original murderer of a guitar. Who is he?"

In partial answer, the very tall and lean man ripped his hand across the strings. Out poured the voice, strong yet hoarse and melancholy, of one who has not seen his homeland for twenty-five years.

"*Tyke me back to dear old Blighty,*
Put me on the tryne for London Town . . ."

"Not so loud," H.M. called across the road. The voice dropped to a melancholy yowl.

"I used to know the type," continued H.M. in French. "I have found him here in a bar. He was once the fastest sprinter in the Kensington Light Infantry Territorials."

"Ah, my old fox," chuckled Perez. "Good."

"Very sure, my brave one," H.M. assured him. "I figure to myself, now, what you were thinking. When the dead Collier has tried to rob this jeweller, on the roof opposite sits a fat Italian with a guitar. You have wondered to yourself whether the loud singing and playing would conceal the noise of an electric drill?"

"It is not for nothing," growled Perez, "they call you the old goodman."

"Yet one remembers," said H.M., "that, when the alarm of burglars begins, this Italian has dropped his guitar and smashed it. No, my cauliflower! No accomplice would have been so surprised that he dropped his guitar. That man was what he pretended to be. My man across the street is there to watch and be ready to run. Where now is the Colonel?"

"By here," muttered Perez, and they turned into the dark alley.

"Yours was good advice," Perez continued. "There are two of our best men across the street. Sergeant Garcia and I are at the back of this alley. The Colonel is inside the office of the safe with Sergeant Bonfleur. Fewer watchers, but better placed, so you said once. Good!"

Perez tapped—two long, two short knocks—at the side door of Bernstein et Cie.

HE knew now that what he expected was going to happen, and happen within a few minutes. But he could not tell when, in this few minutes. He must not waste too much time, yet . . .

"Enter," said Colonel Duroc in French. H.M. lumbered in, while the Acting Commandant moved on to the back of the alley.

H.M. closed the solid door. The interior was not quite dark, and he could vaguely see the forms of Colonel Duroc and another man.

"By blue," softly swore the Colonel, "this time I cannot see how Iron Chest has any chance whatever. Look there!"

The beam of a torch hooded in tissue paper moved across the room and up the untouched, untouchable surface of the safe. H.M.

stood with his back to the door, which was ordinarily secured by a heavy spring lock, a bolt, and a key. H.M. tapped the door.

"Do you leave this door unlocked?" he asked.

"Of course!" grinned back the Colonel. Without sound, H.M. eased the key out of the door and palmed it in his right hand. Then he began slowly to open the door.

"Where are you going?" asked the startled and alarmed Colonel.

"S-sst! One goes for a little promenade. One will take care."

"Be sure!" hissed Duroc. "The Sultan's diamonds, uninsured, are in that safe as a trap. If Iron Chest creeps into the safe, if anything should go wrong, we are armed to the eyebrows and we shoot."

Slipping out of the door, H.M. closed it and for a moment stood casually with his back to it. From the rear of the alley, of course, Perez and Garcia could dimly see him silhouetted against faint light from the street. Hands behind his back, H.M.'s right hand slipped the key into the lock from outside. Without any noise even when the key turned, he locked it from outside and pocketed the key.

Stealthily he crept to the mouth of the alley, turned round and to the left, and began to edge back up the rue du Statut with one hand trailing over the folding steelwork across the front of the jeweller's store.

Not minutes, now. How many seconds?

Across the street, from the Cockney in disguise, voice and guitar were homesick with an old song:

"We are Fred Karno's army,
The ragtime in-fan-tree,
We cannot fight, we cannot march,
What goddam use are we?"

Then it happened.

A considerable distance away, but seeming nearer, and from the harbour, a broad flare of yellow-white light sprang high above all Tangier. The immense crash of the explosion, as the little cargo and passenger ship *Valencia* blew to pieces without a soul aboard, stunned even those who were used to high explosive in earlier days.

Sir Henry Merrivale threw out his arm towards his confederate across the street. The Cockney, crying out in fluent Spanish that he had just seen a man with an iron chest rushing up from the Grand Socco, himself raced down. Out from one doorway shot two men, flying after the Cockney. Out from the alley flashed Perez and Garcia, also running hard in the same wrong direction.

H.M., now at the door of the mask and costume shop, whipped out another key and put it into the lock. This duplicate key he had cut from a mould taken yesterday and secretly, on a piece of soap, while he and good Señora Bonomi debated his costume as Hassan-el-Mulik.

Twisting the key, opening the door creakily, H.M. closed it behind him. The shop, with a faint glow that showed white and ghastly mask faces, was full of dense smoke with a bitter tang in it:

smoke from a smaller explosion designed to be covered by the first. In it glimmered an electric torch.

"That's enough, Iron Chest," H.M. declared. "Now come out from behind that smoke. Hurry!"

The torch winked.

"I was afraid of this," said a familiar voice.

And, ducking through the smoke, coughing, but with hands raised and left eye still battered, stood up the figure of Bill Bentley.

For a moment they stared at each other, while Bill kept the light on the floor.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked, holding out his hands as though for handcuffs.

"Well, what's the matter with *you?*" said H.M. in a kind of muffled bellow. "I'm not here to arrest you or capture you. I'm here to get you away, out of Tangier and into a safe place for good. Yes, yes, don't tell me; your wife didn't know one single thing about your career as Iron Chest; but I told her and she adores you for it. The special 'plane's ready for both of you. Now follow me, and run like blazes!"

TWO days later, at ten o'clock in the morning, an awning was lowered over the red tiles and marble balustrade of the terrace outside Colonel Duroc's house on the Old Mountain.

It protected those on the terrace from a white, burning sun unusual so early in the year. The only occupant, at the moment, was Colonel Duroc in uniform, but without a cap, pacing backwards and forwards with short, fussy steps. Though his face was not quite purple, it was near enough.

Stopping his pacing, he swung again towards the front door and for the third time yelled for the fat'ma, whose padded slippers brought her forth again.

"This viper—!" roared the Colonel. Then, with much dignity, he clamped himself hard. You must not speak thus before servants, especially Arab servants. "Is Sir Henry Merrivale not even awake yet?"

The fat'ma gave him a reproachful look.

"The goodman," she corrected, "still snores in healthy slumber."

Colonel Duroc put his hands over his eyes.

"Now hearken unto me," he continued in Arabic, "for this time I swear it by Allah. If this *goodman* is not present, here on this balcony, within ten minutes of the clock, I will strangle you with my own hands."

Though the fat'ma gave him another injured glance as she moved, it is a fact that within at least ten minutes the viper in question stood on the balcony. Sir Henry Merrivale, freshly shaven, had a look of pure serenity on his face. He still wore carpet slippers, pyjamas and dressing gown, the latter two being of such hideous intertwined colours that Duroc could not decide which was worse.

"Morning, Colonel," said H.M. serenely. He inflated his chest and hammered his fist on it.

Colonel Duroc deliberately turned his back and folded his arms.

The fat'ma rolled out the tea waggon, piled with a breakfast of two hard-boiled eggs, huge slices of ham together with those red sausages which seem to come from heaven rather than Italy, well-buttered toast, a large silver coffee pot with milk jug and all the accessories.

Indicating that H.M. was to sit down on the swing, which he did, she placed his collation on the table piece by piece over a smooth linen cloth.

"Thank'ee, ma'am," said H.M. "This is downright handsome, this is."

The fat'ma, showing all her gold fillings in a smile, reverently bowed backwards out of his presence. With immense satisfaction H.M. picked up the coffee pot in one hand, the milk jug in the other, and poured both. Then, after a long pull at the coffee, he set down the cup.

"Nice weather we're havin'," he volunteered.

The Colonel, back towards him, did not comment.

"I say, Colonel," observed H.M., mildly bothered, "somehow I sense a distinctly chilly feeling in the atmosphere. What have *I* done?"

Duroc, completely staggered, spun round and let go in English.

"What have you done?" he demanded, as though this question had been put to him by some modern Jack the Ripper.

"Uh-huh. That's right."

"Villain! Serpent! Traitor!" began Duroc, in the best Chamber-of-Deputies' style. But again he recovered himself for a statement of dignity. "All well, I tell you. This Bill Bentley, this Iron Chest—and also his poor innocent wife, who will regret this to the bitterest of her dying day—you have arranged for them to escape to a country in East Africa from which there is no extradition by any country. And this so-innocent-looking Bentley is an impostor and a thief and a murderer!"

H.M. took up a knife and neatly decapitated a hard-boiled egg.

"Well . . . now," he said. "Tell me, Colonel: just how many murders has Bentley committed?"

There was a silence.

The Colonel opened his mouth, but shut it again. He glanced over towards one of the wicker chairs, on which were piled high his thick *dossiers*.

"Can you think of one, son?" asked H.M.

But Duroc shot out his forefinger.

"Actually, no! The policeman in Brussels, understood, did not die. He is not even insane, since he has only that small loss of memory about the shooting. But what of intention, old hound fox? He fires almost straight into Emil Leurant's forehead, eh?" jeered the Colonel. "That is good, eh? And why does he do it?"

"Because," replied H.M., "for the first and only time in his life—in Brussels on May 5, last year—he completely lost his head.

You know why. But it nearly sent Bentley out of his mind. He's been brooding about it ever since."

"He regrets this, eh? Pah! I present you with the nuts!"

"Stop a bit," muttered H.M., groping in the pockets of his dressing gown. "I forgot to show you that cable, the latest news from Brussels . . ."

"What cable?" demanded the Colonel.

"Well, it was from the Brussels police. Since three weeks after that shootin' of the policeman, Emil Leurant has been receiving a pension. It's paid monthly, through so many banks that the police can't or don't want to trace it . . ."

"What is this?"

"I'm tellin' you. The pension to that policeman is the same as the salary of the Commissioner of Police at Brussels. If you don't believe me, I can show you the cable."

Colonel Duroc twitched a handkerchief out of his sleeve, mopped his forehead, and replaced the handkerchief.

"But now I have you, old *farceur!*" he snapped. "There was a big woman in Madrid. She had tried to rush at him, and Bentley or Iron Chest has deliberately shoot against her hip . . ."

"Not according to her own testimony, he didn't," said H.M. "Lord love a duck! I forgot to show you—"

"Not another cable? No, no, no!"

"But it is. Madrid police. Upstairs in my inside coat pocket. The woman herself says she swung her big hip the wrong way when she should have swung it the proper way. And Bentley, an A-1 crack shot who was trying to miss her as he always did, couldn't help her swinging straight into the bullet when it was too late."

Colonel Duroc looked dazed.

"It seem to me," he cried, "that you would defend this man as well as help him. All well; he is not a murderer. But you cannot deny he is a burglar and a mean thief!"

H.M. considered for a moment, his breakfast forgotten.

"Y'know, Colonel, you can deduce well enough on hard facts. But you can't see motives, or understand plain, ordinary, human beings."

"Then I pray explain me!"

"Bill Bentley," H.M. went on thoughtfully, "was the only real sportsman of a criminal, if you can call him a criminal at all . . ."

"*Quoi?*"

". . . . I ever met in my life. That's why he and Alvarez got on so well. If you'd seen his face, when Alvarez called him 'sportsman' just before the fight with Collier . . . Never mind, you weren't there. But let's see, now—whom did Bentley rob?"

"Who he rob?"

"You yourself told me," continued H.M., "he never once cracked a private house. In other words, he never took a penny from anyone who could even remotely be affected by losin' it. What did he crack? *Only* big firms of jewellers and rich small banks, which—d'ye see?—were bound to be heavily protected by insurance. Ever think of that?"

" But, whoever shall lose, it is against the law ! "

" Oh, absolutely," agreed H.M., leaning lazily back in the swing. Again that expression of serenity stole across his face. " It's against the law. It's shockin'. Big companies oughtn't ever to be nicked like that, ought they ? And yet somehow, me being an old sinner, it fails to curdle my blood. It's too much like doin' down the bookies or the income tax. All three of 'em fair game."

There was a silence, while H.M.'s voice seemed to thicken.

" And now," he said, " would you like to hear the real, personal, human-being reason why I wanted Bentley to escape ? "

" Yes," snapped the Colonel, his face empurpling again. " If you can."

Whereupon, deplorable to relate, H.M.'s temper blew to pieces with a bang. He surged up, amid a heavy rattle of dishes.

" It was because I liked both of 'em," he roared. " That's all ; that's enough. Especially I liked that little gal Paula. *You* talk about ' regrets ' and ' dyin' days.' Cor ! Before I'd let 'em break that gal's heart by arresting her husband, I'd have upset the government of hell and kicked Satan off the smoky throne ! Don't come any moralist nonsense over me ; it won't go down. Don't try any blatter about ' law ' or ' justice ' ; we both know they don't exist, unless we go out and get 'em for ourselves. Now stick that where you like, but don't forget it ! "

Colonel Duroc moistened dry lips. Several changes of colour had come over his face during H.M.'s outburst.

" You would break any law," he muttered, very slowly, " for the sake of friendship . . . "

His voice trailed away. He turned his back and walked to the balustrade, where he looked down over the ridges of Tangier. Beside him on the balustrade stood a marble urn frothing over with darkening purple blossom. Colonel Duroc tore off an edge of blossom and fretted it. He glanced sideways at the marble nymph.

H.M., whose temper had subsided and who looked a bit sheepish, spoke just the same.

" You'd have done the same thing, Colonel," he said quietly, " if you'd known the characters of the people. What's more, from what I guess of your life, you've done it yourself more than once."

" Pah ! " said the Colonel without turning round. But he did not deny the statement.

Meantime, H.M. rediscovered his breakfast. Ham, toast, sausages were wolfed down as well as the last scraping of egg. He was sitting back drinking coffee before the Colonel spoke again. Duroc seemed to address an oration to the ridges of Tangier.

" I should have been warned," he declared passionately. " Do not I know already this man's record in America ? By burn, it is '*orr*-ible ! "

" Oh, son, I was only gettin' justice."

The Colonel sighed, whipped round on his heel, and marched back to H.M.

" My friend," he said in a new and different voice, " in my

official position I cannot approve your lunatic notion of law. But never think I do not understand."

And he thrust out his hand. H.M. shook it heartily; then, as at their first meeting on this balcony, they were both strongly embarrassed. The usual way out was not available. Unless they were a couple of topers, they could not shout for a bottle of whisky at breakfast time. But it was the Colonel who found inspiration.

"Listen," he urged. "I am acquainted with all the facts, yes. But, if I do not see the people, I do not understand at all. Will you begin at the beginning, and tell me the whole story again; also how you pluck out clues where I see no clues?"

"I second that motion," exclaimed Maureen Holmes, hurrying on to the terrace.

Maureen, her dark-green frock a contrast to her green eyes, looked happy and healthy, yet, with her romantic mind, unhappy too.

"I know some things," she said. "I know Paula and Bill had to go away." She swallowed. "But how did Iron Chest vanish out of a street in Brussels? How did Iron Chest make diamonds and the chest disappear, when I was there? . . . It's over an hour before I can see Juan."

Maureen sat down. Colonel Duroc drew up a chair.

"Proceed," said the Colonel.

"All right," agreed H.M., inhaling smoke complacently. "I'll begin at the very start, when I arrived in the 'plane with this stubborn, insultin' wench here—*shut up*—and neither of us had ever heard of Iron Chest. The Colonel was bein' as crafty as Machiavelli and Tom Sawyer put together. While he was putting up a welcome for me as the mighty boozer and wencher, which the same I am not—*shut up*—he was luring me out to this house so that he could apply soft words and get me into this mess. Alvarez himself had to act like the Mystery Man from Indianapolis.

"Well, Paula Bentley was there, to represent her husband from the British Consulate. In all innocence she made a remark. I'll tell you what it was." H.M.'s prodigious memory could reach back and grip the smallest detail. "She said, 'They're always sending poor Bill to some dreadful places all over the world to write a report about mud or bananas or machinery or something.' And, 'Of course Bill returned only three days ago.'

"Now two facts—that her husband was doin' a lot of travelling, and that Lisbon is an airport centre for Western Europe—didn't register in my onion at all. Why should they?

"Or another point, after, hem, my noble welcome at the airport. Paula ran off and 'phoned her husband I was here. I know now—from what she told me herself—she told him she could easily tell where we were going: to this house. Remember, she told Alvarez out loud when he was cavortin' that car on one wheel; Paula said *she'd* tell us where we were goin' if Alvarez didn't; and she said she knew it all the time when we got here. But again, why should it make me wonder?

"As a result, here we landed and you know the rest, outwardly.

Even the Old Man's mild temper was goaded by the barefaced, low-minded insults of a person whom I'm not goin' to name, except that she'll look terrible if she doesn't powder the left side of her nose . . ."

Maureen groaned.

" Oh, please," she begged. " I knew you could solve the mystery. You've done it. But you were so overbearing, so insufferable . . ."

" *Me?* "

". . . that I had to challenge you. I—I'm awfully sorry. I know your outward attitude towards women is all a fake," said Maureen sweetly, lifting her chin and looking him in the eyes, " and I'm not afraid of you. Except sometimes, maybe," she added hastily. " But "—her gaze drifted away again—" if anybody had taken your bet about Iron Chest, you'd have lost it. You didn't nail him in forty-eight hours. No, wait! Please, I apologize."

" Cease and desist this argument," snapped Colonel Duroc. " Enough, now, continue! "

"HEM!" said H.M., gratified and emitting poisonous smoke. " Now listen carefully, because we're coming to the one key that unlocks nearly every mystery in the case.

" On this balcony, with the wench taking notes, the Colonel begins to tell me about—so he says—a vicious, mean-minded murderer. Oh, my eye! Even before he described that business at Brussels, there were flames crawlin' up my collar at the general information. What struck me most was this: on every one of his burglaries, this unknown man had carried a chest made of iron, one foot deep and wide by two feet long, weighing forty pounds or maybe more . . . Cor!

" That sent me into a minor fit, as maybe you both noticed. Questions and answers went buzzin' through my head so fast after I told this wench to write it down, that I stumbled on the real answer almost before I realized it. *Why* did he do that?

" Stop a bit—what had I already heard? Out of a number of burglaries not a soul could give any description of this feller. Not a soul could describe his face, his clothes, anything, even though some of 'em, many, as I later learned, must have got close to him. Why couldn't they describe him?

" Got it! Or maybe. Because that big, glimmerin' iron chest, with a frieze of monkeys' heads, would rivet everybody's eyes. It would hypnotize 'em away from noticing anything else. They wouldn't be looking for a man, but an iron chest. It would be the best possible misdirection. It would be the best possible disguise, except that . . .

" No. Won't do. Unless the feller really is scatty, he won't lug about a weight like that just as a disguise. It'd be simpler to stick a mask on his face. No, no! That's out too, unless . . ."

H.M.'s big voice trailed away. He let a cloud of smoke drift up.

" That was the point, if you remember, where I said, ' I want more information. Though it's just possible that . . .'

"I didn't finish. Because the real, honest-injun explanation dropped on my cokernut like a horseshoe.

"*Suppose the iron chest wasn't really made of iron? Suppose it was made of heavy cardboard on a slim wooden frame? Suppose it could be folded together flat, like a lot of boxes?* Suppose *it had been painted, by a first-class still-life artist, to look exactly like iron under a dull light?*"

"But . . ." protested Maureen.

"Uhuh," said H.M., "I know what you're goin' to say, my wench. The Colonel here showed us the genuine article—captured by the police from Iron Chest himself—and it weighed forty pounds! Oh my fatheads, don't you see Iron Chest meant the police to get that chest—*and* a second one, to make double sure? They were just a blind, both of them."

Again there was a pause. H.M.'s head stuck out like an ogre's from under the swing awning, and his voice was like the ogre's.

"*Now then,*" he leered, "*this light cardboard chest would serve a double purpose. It would fix attention on the chest, not the man, especially if he carried it as though it were very heavy; you've seen the same thing done in comedy. Second purpose? If he ever got into a tight corner, it could immediately be folded flat—one foot wide, two feet long, with a hook—and be hidden inside the back of a loose topcoat.*"

Colonel Duroc smiled sourly.

"Well," said H.M. in his normal voice, "that was the idea that bumped me. I told you to go on, Colonel, but it was rustlin' and buzzin' round in what you might call a bothered way while you told me about the jewel robbery and shooting and vanishing trick in Brussels."

"Wait," protested Maureen again. "This won't do."

"Ho?"

"The policeman who was shot and recovered from it . . . He touched the chest; in fact, he gripped it on each side with his arms over and under! He can testify it *must* have been made of iron."

"Oh, no, he can't," said H.M. "Lord love a duck, but that was the very thing that stumped and sugared me while the Colonel here was telling the story. Until I suddenly remembered—" Here he looked sternly at Maureen. "Got that notebook of yours?"

"I—I'm afraid I lost it," she answered, lowering her defences. "So much has been happening—"

"We-ell, never mind. I'll try to quote from memory, my wench. The Colonel here told me just what you've said: that this copper, Emil Leurant, remembered getting a good grip on the chest and then seeing the burglar's face before the shot was fired. But, says Leurant, he can't remember anything about the face.

"Right! That seemed to stymie everything, including the vanishing. But, not ten seconds afterwards, the Colonel said: 'Thus the policeman, Emil Leurant, is fairly clear up to the time he saw the iron chest; and at once the man fired.' Whoa! Oi! That's a clear contradiction. Will you explain, Colonel?"

Colonel Duroc inclined his head.

"You see, Mademoiselle Maureen," he said, "Emil Leurant honestly believes to this day he touched iron. But he did not. He thinks so because he has *seen* the chest, and heard so much about it. The contradiction, which myself I do not perceive until this old pirate pointed it out, is that these things do not happen in what you call slow motion. Leurant dives for the chest; Bentley fires. Zip! At once! Like that! And Leurant cannot really remember touching the chest or seeing the man's face."

"And so, towards the end of the story," continued Sir Henry Merrivale, "my cokernut was hit again. Two apparent contradictions made one real truth. The 'iron' chest really was painted cardboard on a wooden frame, ready to be folded up. D'ye have a clear picture of what happened in that quiet, dim-lit little street, with the trees on each side?

"Bentley is in mid-career as Iron Chest. He steps out of the jeweller's. The copper leaps and for the first time somebody *touches* that chest. That's why Bentley goes completely loony and fires. Then he's in even a worse trap. People will come running from a street of lighted cafés nearby.

"What he did would take much less than the few seconds he needed. His diamond loot's in his pocket. He steps into the heavy shadow under a tree, he flattens out that cardboard chest with its hook at the narrow end, he whips off his jacket . . .

"No," H.M. corrected himself. "I had to stop there. The jacket of an ordinary suit fits too closely to hide the bulk of that cardboard, if it's slung from the collar down the back. Iron Chest has to be wearing a loose coat of some kind. And yet everybody swears it's a very warm night; it couldn't be an overcoat or a topcoat. The only thing left would be one of those long Continental raincoats. So," said H.M. simply, "I asked the Colonel whether there'd been any rain that night. He said there had, but for some reason you both seemed to think I was ready for the loony bin myself."

"True, true," said the scowling Colonel. "And just before that, you might remind Miss Holmes . . ."

"Hah," agreed H.M., again leering at Maureen. "Just before that, speaking of Iron Chest, the Colonel had said, 'All, of course, have read about him in the newspapers.' I told you to write that down, because it was very important. You glared at me; just glared."

"I didn't glare! I didn't! I only thou—"

"Never mind," said H.M. with hurt dignity. "But it was important. Because, as I keep stressing, the iron chest was the whole point. When those people poured across from both sides into the street, they were like the policeman—they looked for an iron chest. Whoever carried the chest, they reasoned accordin' to their lights, must be the criminal, because he couldn't get rid of it. He was stuck with that weight. He couldn't chuck it over a fence, or hide it, or do anything with it. But all Bentley did, as I told you, was step behind a tree and in a matter of seconds hide a piece of cardboard. They saw him, all right; he mixed and mingled with 'em; but his hands were empty and nobody noticed him.

" And that's the very simple secret of every apparent 'vanishing' in the whole business. Have you got it now, my wench ? "

Maureen nodded. " Yes, but how . . ."

" Be quiet and you'll hear. Immediately afterwards, when the Colonel began to tell me about that affair in Paris, we heard a very old car come rattling up the road. That car conked out for good in the garage. But in it was a tall young feller, with wide shoulders, wearing a conical straw hat and exactly the sort of grey raincoat I'd been thinkin' about. Cor, didn't my eyes begin to bulge ! "

" I told poor Juan," interrupted Maureen, " about that very raincoat, the following afternoon."

" And," grunted H.M., " the little gal herself—Paula, I mean—burbled about how ridiculous that raincoat was when she was cryin' on my shoulder after the Bentley-Collier fight. But never mind that . . . We're speakin' of Bentley's arrival here in the old car.

" The little gal had already gone. But I insisted, remember, that this Bentley should sit down and hear the readin' of all the evidence against Iron Chest. Occasionally I'd chuck a casual question at him, mostly about himself. Neither of you two can remember, because he never troubled to conceal anything. But I'll bet he's more than once talked about his background with his wife.

" His old man had started him in life as an electrical engineer, because Bill thought that meant nothing but tinkerin' with gadgets. He loved tinkering with gadgets, such as that car. An electric safe drill would have been nuts to him . . ."

" *Quoi ?* " demanded Colonel Duroc, galvanized.

" That's the slang English," said H.M. " It means he'd have loved it and liked to use it. Now stop interrupting me ! But Bentley found electrical engineering was more than he thought. So he dropped it and took up painting. Though he couldn't paint figures for nuts . . . easy, Colonel . . . he was first-class at still life. He could have made and painted that ' iron ' chest as easy as winking. Finally, he'd done a great deal of travelling, and his base *must* have been Lisbon."

Colonel Duroc rose to his feet, bowed formally, and sat down again.

" You note, Miss Holmes," he said, " that this old *coquin* has not solved your mystery within forty-eight hours. He has solved it within forty-eight minutes."

" No, no, no ! " protested H.M., so serious that he did not even bask in a compliment. " That was only a mild indication . . .

" WHILE we sat here on this balcony with Bentley, I kept watchin' him. He was good-natured and easy-going ; no sham about that. But also his brain could move like lightning. In the boxing match he showed both his brain and his body could move together so fast it blurred your eyesight. But never mind that, now.

" At the same time he was sittin' here, you, Colonel, were pouring out the whole story of Iron Chest's career. Originally I swallowed your version of him as a vicious-minded murderer.

" But what did the Colonel tell me ? In twelve spectacular

burglaries, Iron Chest has been seen in public, and people have rushed straight for him, at least nine times. Nine times! Furthermore, he's fired from one to a number of shots at 'em.

"That, of course, was to keep anybody from touching the imitation chest. But a fusillade like that! You'd think that the rottenest shot, who was mean-souled and vicious, must have got at least half of 'em at close range through the head or body. Burn me, anybody must have! *And yet not one of 'em is touched*, except a fat Spanish gal who swung her hip the wrong way by accident and the Brussels policeman. D'ye see? That's where—as I said later—I revised my estimate of matters. This rain of bullets that miss is too much. Iron Chest is really a top-notch crack shot, so afraid of even wounding anybody that he fires a deliberate near-miss even when he's in danger. And, I learned later that same evening, Bill Bentley was the best pistol shot in Tangier.

"It was on that same night, too," H.M. went on earnestly, "that the first actual evidence began to show. Bentley and Collier were partners. Bentley allowed Collier, though Bentley was worried about it, to try that first burglary at Bernstein's. But . . ."

"Please," exclaimed Maureen, "I *must* ask a question or burst!"

When the ogre looked at her, Maureen used all her considerable femininity when she returned the look; and the ogre was as wax.

"I can understand," said Maureen, "how Bill could have prowled all over Western Europe—Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, Rome, Madrid, Lisbon—but no farther, because he hadn't time and he had a real consular mission somewhere else. He could leave here with his own passport. He had to, because everybody knew him . . ."

"That's not bad, my wench!" said H.M., watching her shining eyes. "But, when he got to Lisbon, what would he do?"

"He'd pick up his burglar's kit and cardboard iron chest," Maureen rushed on rapidly, her eyes fixed and wide, "at . . . at Lisbon, of course! He'd hide them there each time, because he had to start from Lisbon wherever he went. And he'd start from Lisbon . . . yes, with a fake passport." Her inspiration failed. "But where would he get a fake passport?"

"From good old Ali," said H.M., regarding her like a schoolmaster with a favourite pupil. "You weren't there, but the Colonel was, when I said the first question I asked Ali in my interview was whether he could get me a fake passport. That was so simple . . . Cor!

"No," H.M. hastened to add, "Bentley never did meet Ali, or any of the gang. Bentley did it through Collier. He sent a photograph with a fine wig and a toothbrush moustache. 'Course, Bentley's fake passport would be English, his profession written in as . . ."

Maureen stretched out both hands to him.

"Locksmith!" she cried. "Just as Collier did once. Then Iron Chest could go through the customs anywhere, explain all his burgling kit and even the drill, and point to 'locksmith' on his passport. The iron chest, which seemed to be the biggest problem, was really the easiest. He could wrap up the chest, flattened, in a brown-

paper parcel, and stick it at the back of the trunk. Even if a customs inspector wanted it opened, he could have tacked a painting of his own over the frame. It was easy ! "

Up to this point H.M., the schoolmaster, had listened complacently while Maureen's imagination confirmed things that Bill Bentley had told him before Bill and Paula departed hastily in the special 'plane. Now an evil look showed on H.M.'s face as he remembered. Maureen's guesses were partly from real evidence, but partly from information received. *He* was the one for analysis and deduction. He was the Old Man.

" Hoy," he said sternly.

" I was only thinking . . . yes, Sir Henry ? "

" You said you wanted to ask a question. All you've done is gone on gibberin' like Cassandra. What's your question ? Then *I'm* tellin' this story."

" I'm afraid it will have to be two questions now."

" Then fire away ! Let's hear 'em."

" It's true, isn't it, that Bill Bentley left all his Iron Chest gear—disguise, passport, burglar's kit, imitation chests, and so on—in Lisbon somewhere ? He never brought them to Tangier ? "

" That's right. He was too well known here. Suppose somebody spotted 'em at the British Consulate ? Or in his hotel room ; his wife, for instance ? No, he never brought anything here."

" Then," blurted Maureen, " Collier must have carried at least the burglar's kit and the imitation chest through the customs here. But it wasn't an ordinary customs inspection. Colonel Duroc, the whole French customs force and Tangier police. They didn't merely inspect. They measured and weighed and opened and tore things to pieces. That's my question. How, *how* could Collier bring those things through the customs without being caught ? "

" Collier didn't bring 'em," replied H.M. woodenly.

" But someone must have brought them . . . Who did ? "

" I did," answered H.M.

" *WHAT ?* "

" Oh, my wench ! " said H.M. dismally. " It's the only possible solution. Swing your mind back again to the afternoon we arrived. We were both given diplomatic immunity from having our luggage searched. Don't you remember how they whisked out two trunks and the hand luggage, and piled it into a little luggage van that followed us down here ? "

" You mean this man Collier put the stuff in your trunk before the Lisbon 'plane left for Tangier ? "

" Uh-huh."

" But wouldn't that have been dangerous ? "

" No, not much. You can deduce what happened from the facts. Remember, Bentley had been back in Tangier only a few days. Collier was still in Lisbon. On March 31, one day before our 'plane left, Colonel Duroc set off a whole blast of sky-rockets from every newspaper here. They shouted that the One and Only Bacchus,

the Prince of All Wenchers, would arrive next day by the nine-thirty 'plane; and that he would be given an official reception.

"What follows? Bill Bentley, who was in the Consular, knew perfectly smacking well what an official reception meant. Among other things, it meant that the visitin' Stuffed Owl and anybody with him would be allowed immunity from luggage search.

"Then what would Bentley naturally do? He'd 'phone Collier in Lisbon, and tell him to put the stuff inside my trunk.

"After you've weighed in a trunk at a big airport, it's hoicked away. It stands for a while, with a lot of other trunks or luggage, before they shove it on the 'plane. Each brand of modern trunk, and there aren't so very many brands, has its own key pattern; you can accumulate a whole string of duplicates. Bentley and Collier both had sets of duplicates.

"So Collier, while the trunk was there with the others, simply walked up and unlocked what was presumably his own trunk. Into it he put the burglar's kit and the imitation chest flattened out. He locked the trunk and walked away. I've done the same thing myself and nobody noticed. Only it did happen to be my own trunk."

Here H.M., fiendish glee in his face, rubbed his hands together.

"So again," he went on, "we come back to our arrival here, and that luggage van tearin' after us. You'd gone for a walk," he looked at Maureen, "but the Colonel and I heard the van come bumpin' into the garage under this balcony. We even heard the servants carrying up the luggage to the bedrooms on the floor above.

"Now again I want you to remember the arrival of Bentley, *in that roomy raincoat*, as he drives up and the car, or so he says, drops dead. I want you to see a piece of smilin' effrontery that was done smack under our eyes, and we didn't see it!"

"Effrontery?" repeated Maureen.

"Yes. Now what was the very first thing Bentley did, after he said his car had died?"

"But he didn't do anything . . . Wait! Well, he only ran upstairs to telephone for a taxi. The 'phone is upstairs."

"Right. But on that same floor just above, as the Colonel pointed out when we arrived, what else was there?"

"Our bedrooms. With the luggage!" Enlightenment struck Maureen's eyes. "But you can't mean Bill possibly—"

"Oh, yes. He made a genuine 'phone call for a taxi. But also he had to hurry, in case somebody wanted to unpack. He had the few seconds necessary to go to my bedroom, open the trunk with his own duplicate key, take out the stuff, and lock the trunk again. Whereupon, if it please you, my fatheads, he hung the flattened chest from its hook to the back of his jacket inside the raincoat. The wrapped-up cloth kit of burglar's tools, which isn't so very long or thick after all, also went inside his raincoat, propped up along his side, with his hand supporting it through his side pocket. And in this he casually strolled downstairs.

"But that wasn't all, not by a jugful! Y'see, he couldn't get into the taxi and drive away in full view of all of us. If he did, he'd

have to sit down on that cardboard and light wood imitation chest, and he'd smash it to blazes. He had to wait until it was dark enough so that he could unhook it and sling it out sideways in the taxi.

" So for two mortal hours, while the taxi driver went to sleep, he stayed there lounging against the balustrade with all the stuff in his raincoat, while he talked amiably about the adventures of Iron Chest, or Collier's arrival. Mind you, I already *suspected* the bloke. But I never dreamed he'd have the colossal, star-gazin' cheek to do that, especially as I didn't think until later about his equipment being in my own trunk. I can still see Bentley's face, solid and innocent looking, but with the straight sardonic wit at the corners of his eyes.

" When it was gettin' dark enough, he gave us a kind of a stumblin' farewell. I'd already suggested taking him in with us, to keep an eye on him. But he got into the taxi with his goods, and sailed away : first to hand the stuff to Collier, then to meet his wife—who, by the way, had said she was supposed to meet *him*."

" Well done ! " Maureen blurted out involuntarily.

" Pah ! " snorted Colonel Duroc. " Goose me, no ! "

H.M. silenced both with a malignant look.

" Back we come," he said, " to that fatal first night, the night of the burglary at Bernstein's, when I was sure Bentley was our man. By the way, does anybody here know a Turk named Abdul Yussuf ? "

Duroc merely grunted. Maureen declared a firm negative.

" Well, you don't have to." H.M. sounded comfortable. " He's only a piece of background ; what's important, in its own way, is his evidence. As I say, he's a Turk who always wears an Arab *jalebah* with full-peaked hood. He's got a licence to keep a garden to drink mint tea on the top of an old tower near the joining of the Mediterranean and the harbour."

" I remember," said Maureen. " Paula told me."

" Yes. She and Bill had gone for a swim. Afterwards they decided—it was still early—to drink mint tea on top of this tower. The old boy in the *jalebah*, who was drowsin' near the door, speaks English better than I do. He thought their conversation was sinister, and reported it to the nearest police station. They wrote it down, but nobody thought it was very sinister. It was only revealing.

" Bill talked a lot about Iron Chest : mainly telling what I've just told you, about what happened to us here, but omitting all reference to his tricks with burgling kits or fake chests. The little girl, Paula, kept insisting he was worried about money.

" And so he was, but not in the way she thought. His motive for playing Iron Chest, though he never admitted being Iron Chest except to me, he never made much of a secret ; it was public property ; certainly he told it to Paula. It was, simply, to retire—to get away from grind and settle among books.

" But now he was worried. He had a tidy little fortune in new, cut, salable diamonds which couldn't be recognized, as well as untraceable cash. Did he need that last raid against the Sultan's diamonds ? Soon he'd retire. Remember, we saw only the froth on top of his mind. But he'd have to tell Paula soon. If somebody had

written down his real thoughts fairly, they might have run something like this: *He did not want to tell her the truth as yet, though there was no reason why he should not have done so . . . He searched his mind for some excuse which, while convincing, should also sound true.* He found it, of course, in spoutin' all that hocus-pocus about capturing Iron Chest and gathering the reward. But let's go on to the time when he takes a roundabout way and idles the car past Bernstein's.

"Y'know, his arrival on the scene seemed *too* pat. A little *too* closely timed. Before the Colonel and I could tumble out that side door together, with the door lamp burning, there was Bentley smack in the middle of things without our knowledge how he'd got there.

"He went whizzin' past us for a clean tackle. Of course, Collier had messed up everything by not studying the premises closely enough beforehand—Iron Chest always studied 'em—and Collier needed help. To give him help, Bentley must also establish an alibi for himself.

"Maybe my eye was becomin' too jaundiced. But, of all the rugger tackles I ever saw, that was the rummiest. He had a straight chance for both knees, not even a hand-off to stop him . . ."

"Hand-off?" repeated Maureen.

"In American football, which is a good deal like rugger, you'd call it a stiff arm."

"Oh. But please go on."

"But his left arm goes up for the iron chest. If he really thinks it's iron, that's an impossible move. I think that's where he probably whispers, 'Don't worry, this is Bill; kick your leg free.' Bill himself later realized how fishy his behaviour had looked, and admitted he ought to have tried a clean tackle. But he still tried to defend himself, with this: 'But the damned iron was polished; kind of a film on it, like polished steel; my fingers slipped on it, and down I went.'

"Lord love a duck, that tore it!

"Unless every combination of probabilities had gone wrong, that chest wasn't made of iron. Now I had to get real evidence.

"Of course I never had any plan for catching Iron Chest, not a concrete one such as I mentioned in the Parade Bar; I was speaking in front of Bentley, and fishing. And you'll understand how Collier 'disappeared' from the rue Waller. For a time Collier lost his head about that chest, and didn't know what to do with it. The wild stamping and neighing of horses in those stables gave the tip-off. If Collier simply folded up the chest, shoved it under straw along the wall, and then flopped down like a toper, rolled over and played drunk, nobody would notice him—and nobody did—because he didn't have the iron chest and couldn't have concealed it. I might add that both Paula and Bill Bentley had a narrow escape; Collier couldn't shoot for beans.

"AND now," H.M. was still revelling, "we come to the next morning. Both you two—as well as Paula and Alvarez—had your dramatic set-to with Collier in the crimson-shuttered flat in

Marshan. I s'pose," he looked drowsily at Maureen, "you want to know why Collier rented the flat, and then immediately put that rental advertisement in the *Tangier Gazette?*"

"It was a fake," exclaimed Maureen.

H.M. glared her into silence. "But not the kind you're thinkin', my wench. Wherever he went, Collier rented a flat. For two reasons: as a secret meeting place for political purposes, and a hide-out where he could cut the diamonds undisturbed. He shipped his load of Bibles and other gear ahead of him, and wrote the manager of the flats about painting the blinds, enclosing the money to do it.

"But before he leaves Lisbon, what happens? Bentley calls him about planting the tools, etcetera, in *my* luggage, and tells him that he, Collier, is to pull the Bernstein deal. That means, in all probability, he won't be in Tangier any time at all—so what does he do? He cables an advertisment to the *Tangier Gazette* offerin' a sublet. It never entered his head that either Paula or Maureen would be looking for an apartment. Cor! Don't you know he was one surprised blighter when Paula walked into that door!"

"Well, that explains the flat and the crimson blinds," admitted Maureen. "*But how on earth did Collier make the chest and those diamonds disappear?*"

"Whatever you wish, my wench," agreed H.M. magnanimously. "Let's take Paula's own account, after she'd burst in on Collier at that inhuman hour and been locked out again. Outside she met Alvarez. Now follow it: they stayed there, by the time given for talking, at least two minutes. Paula heard noises inside. She couldn't identify them. But you tell me: was it a cold day?"

"In the morning, bitterly cold."

"Right. By the way, was there a fire burning in the living room of Collier's flat?"

"Yes, of course, a comparatively small grate holding a bright coal fire that . . ." Maureen drew a quick breath.

"Now at least three times," said H.M. fiercely, "we've heard a description of uncut diamonds. They're smallish, jagged lumps, coloured grey and rough on the surface.

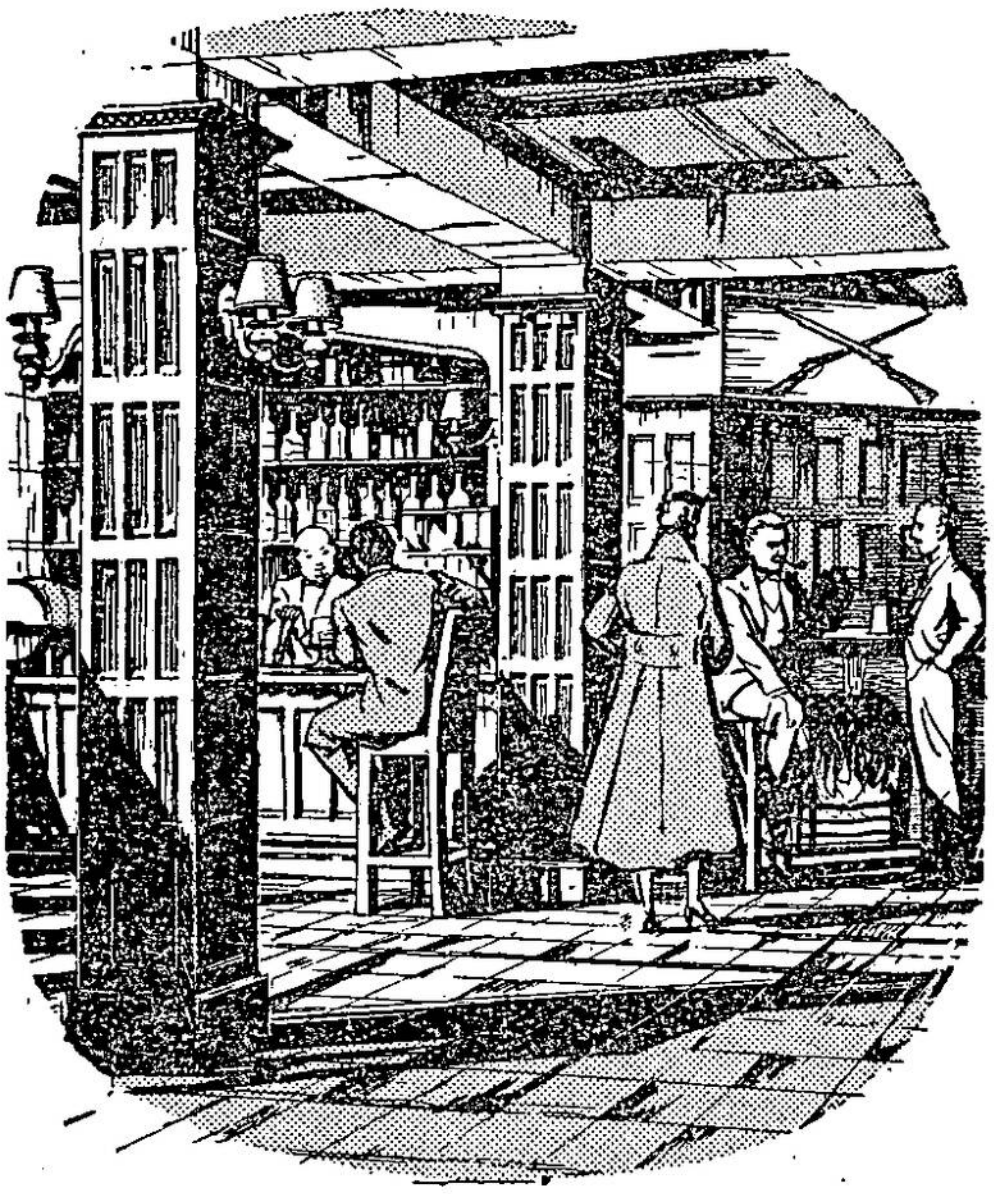
"That's the whole story. Pour your diamonds into the fire, where they'll be covered with greyish ash or coal dust, and they'll be indistinguishable from pieces of unburnt coal. Finally shove in pieces of cardboard, especially with oil paint on 'em, and they'll burn like oil-soaked paper in less than a minute. As for the diamonds —ask any consultant—they won't be harmed or melt in the fire except one so infernally hot it'd have to be ten times fiercer than this."

"But the cardboard! Wouldn't there be ash?"

"Uh-huh, and there was. Ever talk to Alvarez about that? He tramped all over bits of heavy, flaky ash when they'd raked out the fire. That's why his questions were so difficult to answer literally. You were lookin' straight at the stuff, but you never saw it.

"That applies to the great big blazin' clue about the chest. Alvarez saw it; ask him. Or, rather, he was confused and angry,

Welcome to the Inn



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and he wasn't quite sure himself. On the centre table in that room was a tablecloth of very soft velvet. Remember ? "

" Well, something about it."

" Now on that table, and for some time after Paula burst in, had been standing what purported to be a heavy iron chest weighing around forty pounds. But on the soft velvet there wasn't any impression, such as would have been made by a genuine chest. There were no marks even from cardboard and light wood strips. The surface wasn't disturbed at all.

" Of course you see what happened. The tenant of a flat like that is supposed to sweep up the ashes of his own fire, put 'em in a little bin, and stick 'em in a service hatch for the porter to carry down to the cellar.

" Me," said H.M. swelling his chest and tapping it, " not being there, I couldn't tell you what precautions to take. But, when I unburdened myself to the Colonel about iron chests, and he began to smash the furniture, he knew what to do. There was a man at the flats, the Greek porter, who was quite innocent."

" It is so," interposed Colonel Duroc. " He himself takes the ashes and the ' unburnt coal,' which is diamonds, down in the cellar to the ash bin, and dumps them there. I myself lead a party to trap Iron Chest to come and take them. But he does not. No ; Bentley decides to try elsewhere."

H.M. nodded. He took out a cigar, but did not light it.

" And that's nearly all, except for human character—I mean Bill Bentley's—during that rather rough night in the Kasbah, when Collier died.

" 'Course," sneered H.M., lifting one shoulder delicately, " it wasn't a very rough night. True, some—hem—blighter did polish off a Middle-European sneak thief with a knife in an alley on the way there ; but that's got nothing to do with us."

" Ha ha ha," said the Colonel bitterly. " I forget him, yes." His temper foamed. " But this I tell you, Sir Henry. You, who come to detect, are the worst mobster I ever meet. When I find a man's throat slit *so*, and the way his hair has been seized, I know experience when I see it ! Good experience, I say."

" Well . . . now," muttered H.M. deprecatingly. " Maybe I had to do something like that in Marseilles once ; or two or three times at Port Said ; or maybe in Occupied Germany . . ."

" Stop ! " cried the Colonel. " In this detective, there is more depravity than any criminal."

" Not in a fair-play deal, son. I hadda risk that rattlesnake's leap before I could grab him by the hair. But, as I was saying, about Bentley. Bentley had got to the point, that night, where he and Collier had got to part brass rags. He was boilin'. Worst of all, Paula had walked into Collier's parlour. Remember, Collier had seen you and me talkin' together aboard that 'plane, my wench. He'd seen us go across in official welcome. But he'd seen Paula too. Paula walked into his parlour, and reappeared with the police.

" Bentley was quietly waiting an opportunity to see Collier face

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to face, even if Collier betrayed him. Collier had done the one unforgivable thing. Even though he didn't quite know who Paula was, Collier had threatened to cut Paula's throat; and that was like the unforgivable sin. If any danger threatened that little gal . . ."

Maureen spoke softly, without raising her eyes.

"Paula was your darling, too," she stated. "That's mainly why you arranged the getaway. That's really why you called her 'my dolly' and me 'my wench.'"

"Y'know, Colonel," said H.M., "there ought to be a law against women having such long memories about personal trifles."

"I, too, am married," agreed the Colonel.

"And I'm going to *get* married," cried Maureen, her eyes shining. "To Juan, as soon as he gets out of the nursing home."

Leaping to his feet, Colonel Duroc beamed and chuckled all over the place. Only with difficulty was he restrained from shouting for champagne, and his feeling was bitter as regarded H.M.'s disdainful look.

"You," he said witheringly. "You have no heart."

"I do not know," retorted H.M., with a villainous imitation of the Colonel's accent, "which is worse: the sentimentality American —or the sentimentality Belgian."

The Colonel's face turned several colours.

"For the love of Esau," yelled H.M., "be quiet while I finish.

"THAT night, when Alvarez was going into the Kasbah to take Collier, Bill Bentley was quite willing to go. He tried by every means to stop Paula, but she wouldn't be stopped. Now he had a gun. Collier would have a gun; Collier, who'd streaked back to his hotel just after he nipped out of the Marshan flat and reached it just as the alarm went out, had picked up his Banker's Special as well as other things.

"But watch the time that night, when Bill and Paula and I entered old Ali's house by the front door. We sneaked down the stairs towards the carpet room, and got inside in a line against the wall. Neither of you two happened to be there, but I was and I can vouch for what you've heard.

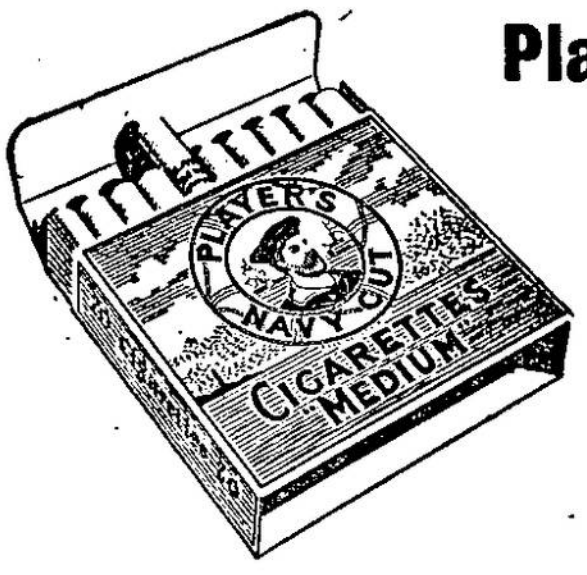
"If I'd ever had a doubt of Bentley's guilt, that was gone now. Standing on a pile of rugs, with his back to us, you could see only Collier's black hair, and a thick body. Paula has said *she* wasn't sure it was Collier. All the talk had been about a red-haired man; he hadn't dyed his hair black until early afternoon. I wasn't absolutely sure myself.

"But Bentley knew instantly. He knew, even though he was never supposed to have seen Collier before. Even on the night in the alley beside Bernstein's, Bentley was lying on his back trying to look back and up; I can testify he couldn't see Collier. But I repeat —Bentley knew. He slid that Webley revolver out of his pocket, whispering something to the effect he never thought he could shoot a man in the back.

"And he couldn't, though it would mean the end of someone

Whatever the pleasure

Player's complete it



Player's Please

[NCC 779] PLAYER'S NAVY CUT CIGARETTES & TOBACCO

who might betray him. He literally, physically couldn't shoot a man in the back. Then he realized something and whispered it. Collier had a gun too. If he called out to Collier, and waited for him to turn round so that they'd be level for a fair duel—well, that was a sportin' proposition and a straight one.

" But we were interrupted.

" Collier heard Alvarez coming from the other direction. It happened so quickly that Bill hadn't even time to get ready. Collier, a bad shot, fired twice at Alvarez and missed. When Alvarez contemptuously walked close, Collier scored with one shot in the chest . . . . I'm sorry, my wench. I don't want to . . ."

" It's all right," said Maureen, lowering her eyes but trembling just the same. " I'm the one who's stupid. He's perfectly all right now. But if I'd been there . . . you see ? "

" Anyway, he came round to our side of the carpet pile, when Bentley twisted the gun muzzle in the back of his neck. While I was examining him, Bentley backed Collier to the middle of the carpets. Just then I happened to glance up and back ; and I saw Collier as well as Bentley when they faced each other.

" Oh, my fatheads ! It was a dead give-away. Collier's eyes opened wide, as they do when you recognize ; then narrowed, and gave Bentley a very meaning look from under the eyelids. Collier said something like, ' What do you think *you're* doing ? ' That emphasis on the ' you ' made it clear that Bentley was no stranger to Collier. Oh, Collier knew !

" Bentley said, ' You'll find out,' with just as significant a look. It could mean only he was warning Collier to keep quiet, and not give him away ; maybe Bentley was here to help him. Whether Collier believed that or not, he honestly believed, at the time, that Ali's men were covering him and he had nothing to fear.

" Then Bentley had a decision to make. Alvarez was badly smashed up. Alvarez, who'd been humiliated three times by a boxer who he knew couldn't even hurt him, was in sick agony. Alvarez would have given his soul to see that Old Pretender smashed. If you don't think Bentley's reason was a sportsman's, I'll just stop here.

" Bentley offered to fight for three reasons, though he wasn't even sure he could beat Collier. He offered it to avenge his friend, because Collier had threatened Paula's life, and finally . . ."

" Yes ? " prompted Maureen.

" He despised Collier for his Communism and his phony fetish of crimson blinds. Of all the people in this world, you couldn't have found two people further apart in character than Bentley and Collier. Just say they differed in everything. Collier hated Bentley almost as much as Bentley hated Collier. When or where they met isn't important. But he *had* to have a diamond cutter who was crooked. Honest diamond cutters ask questions about where uncut stones come from ; and there are very few dishonest ones, 'cause it's just as profitable to be straight.

" For those three reasons. We saw his fine strategy, the risks he took, the way in which he used his head—all Iron Chest's strategy.

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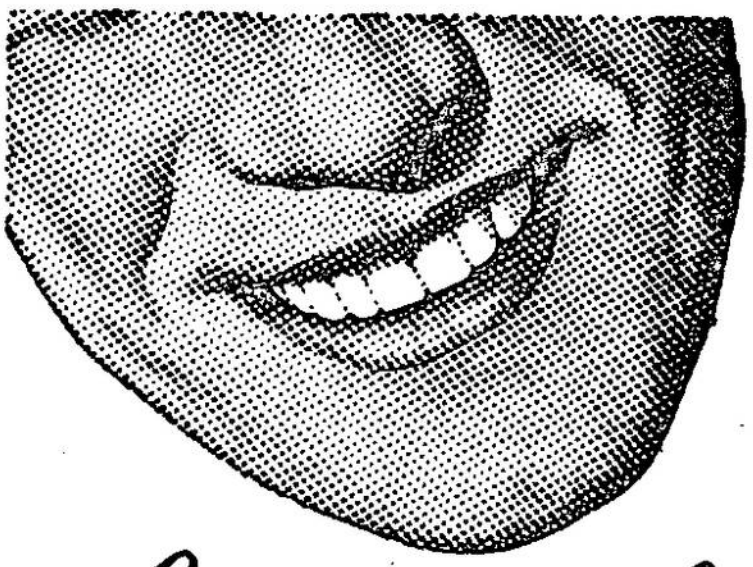

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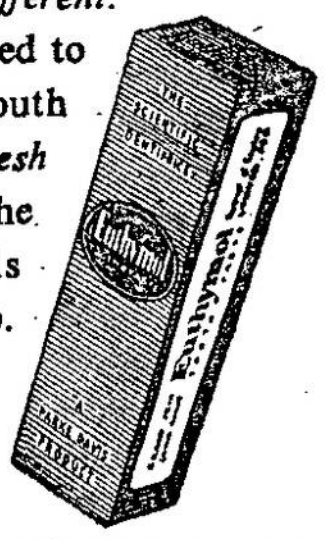

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He was nearly knocked out with a blow to the wind. But he came, and landed that Mary Ann which wrote finis to Collier.

"Collier must have known, when he was being beaten badly, that none of Ali's men could possibly be there; that the police had trapped him and would arrest him. So he'd shout out at the end and denounce Bentley too. Bentley also knew perfectly well, when he threw that final knockout punch, that he himself was done. Once Collier woke up he'd be denounced. So he sat there to take his medicine. All that prevented it was that Collier remained punch-drunk even when he woke up, and all he could think about was gettin' away. So he died against the red window.

"ABOUT Bentley's try against Bernstein's, there's not much to tell. That was two nights ago . . ."

"Yes," interrupted Maureen, "and where were you yesterday? A whole day gone, and even the Colonel couldn't find you?"

"Ha ha ha," said Colonel Duroc. "This old evil-doer does not dare to face me. For one part of the day he is seen smoking *keef* on a bench by the beach, and they photograph him. For another . . ."

"That's enough!" snapped H.M., with massive dignity. "Do you want me to tell you the very last incident, or not? From the second day I was convinced—because of Bentley's vanity, his one bad trait; *I* got no vánity—that he was goin' to crack Bernstein's again if it killed him. And he was determined to do it under our

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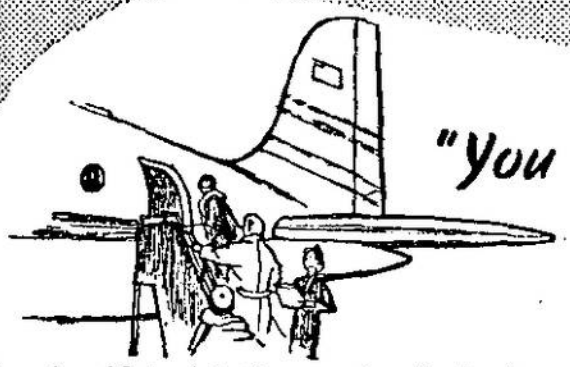

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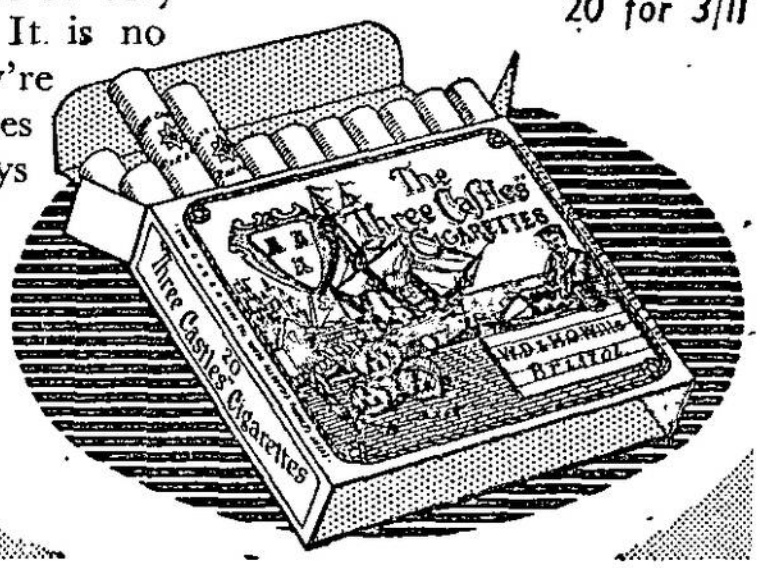

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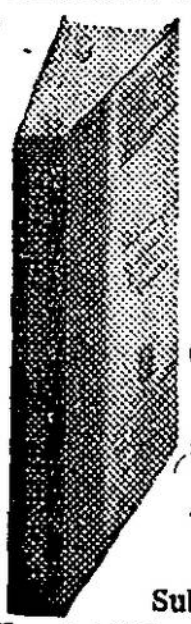

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very noses. But how? He couldn't tackle the front of that safe; it'd be too well guarded.

"But he might, just might, tackle the back of it. He might scrape away, easily, the wood and plaster at the back of the safe which, remember, is against the wall on that side. He knew that both Bernstein's and Luisa Bonomi's would be closed because it was Sunday. During the day, gettin' a key as I got one, he could use his electric drill to make a hole through the back of the safe, almost through the steel. Then he would return that night and with old-fashioned 'soup,' and enough of it, he would blow an opening *if* only he had an explosion timed to cover its noise. He couldn't use a building; Bentley's not the killing kind.

"But there was an empty ship in the harbour, a little one, nobody aboard except a second officer. He could be bribed to set a time fuse and go ashore, his fuse timed exactly with the one to the safe. Risky, but possible. I'd known from the first that was the only way to do it; but I was awful surprised when it really happened.

"After it was all over, I made Bentley leave the diamonds because they were uninsured; I made him leave his finger-prints and another dummy chest, because I promised to give you evidence. And that's all except one tiny fact. The woman in Madrid thought he was bald when Bentley was wearin' only his moustache and no wig. A service-haircut makes you look bald with a hat on; and Bentley's army haircut messed up everything."

"I am glad he got away," Maureen said. "Bill never killed anybody, except the knife thrower in the orange tree, Paula told me, in self-defence. He never robbed anybody who couldn't spare it a thousand times over." Maureen's gaze wandered away for a moment and she seemed lost in thought. "There was another man, or perhaps somebody mostly from folklore," she continued dreamily, "who did the same thing. But he's been honoured and loved for nearly eight hundred years. They—they called him Robin Hood."

H.M. regarded her in astonishment.

"But what have I been trying to tell you all this time . . . my dolly?"

★*To Jane there was nothing frightening about the red brick house over the harbour; nothing strange about the elderly neighbour who loved to discuss gardens. Yet because of them a life-and-death adventure was just round the corner . . .*

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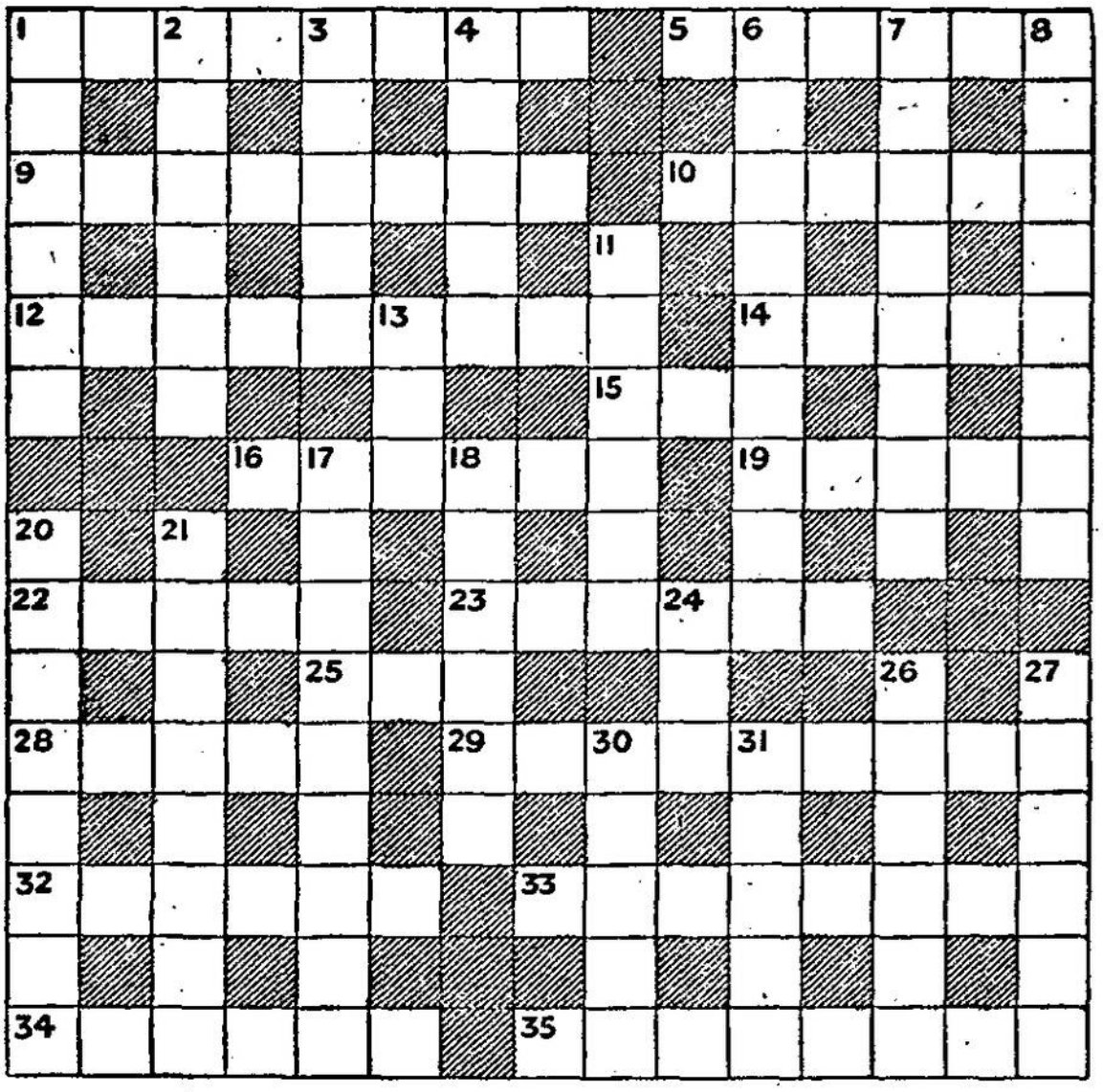
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 98



CLUES

Across

1 A Royal Flush, perhaps, with the middle term upset (8).

5 What Evelyn Waugh might recommend us to do with the loved one! (6).

9 Blue is always the winning colour in this contest (4, 4).

10 Source of ill-health? (6).

12 Exit pater—and put him out for good! (9).

14 These may be in the fire—or in the golfer's bag (5).

15 Joan's part of a circle (3).

16 One might use this appropriately against a Doone (6).

19 You might be headed this way although not a bad egg (5).

22 An apt Indian city (5).

23 Has the combination for cover (6).

25 A bit of a bird (3).

28 The centre of this city is well ventilated (5).

29 O, our Hades might well be this! (4, 5).

32 Sultana of sorts (6).

33 Make a hash of its contents, or they may go in the soup (5-3).

34 Visual aids (6).

35 "That little tent of blue Which —s call the sky" (Oscar Wilde) (8).

Down

1 To make a very small offering? (6).

2 There must be pints of this mineral about (6).

3 "O hateful —, melancholy's child!" (Shakespeare) (5).

4 Two lots of company—a good opening for a drink! (5).

6 Tim canned? The beggar! (9).

7 A Middle Eastern town leads to this obstruction to breathing (8).

8 The girls are after the doctor with a very sticky result (8).

11 Her sea rolls to the grave (6).

13 The point at which shares are on the level? (3).

17 But this scientist is not necessarily a follower of Democritus (9).

18 Where many changes in the affairs of the Church take place (6).

20 This kind of analysis might reveal ghosts or rays (8).

21 Trying hard to put cord round four (8).

24 General Marshall's speciality (3).

26 He rode a long way to get an alibi (6).

27 This alloy has beginnings in church (6).

30 Perfume to spray at Jack? (5).

31 And finally, we are the ones to dupe (5).

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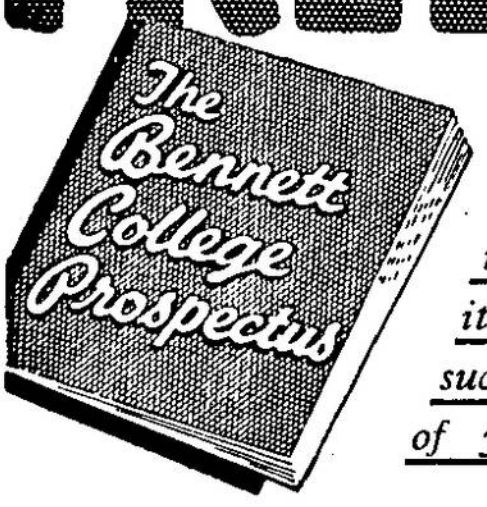

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